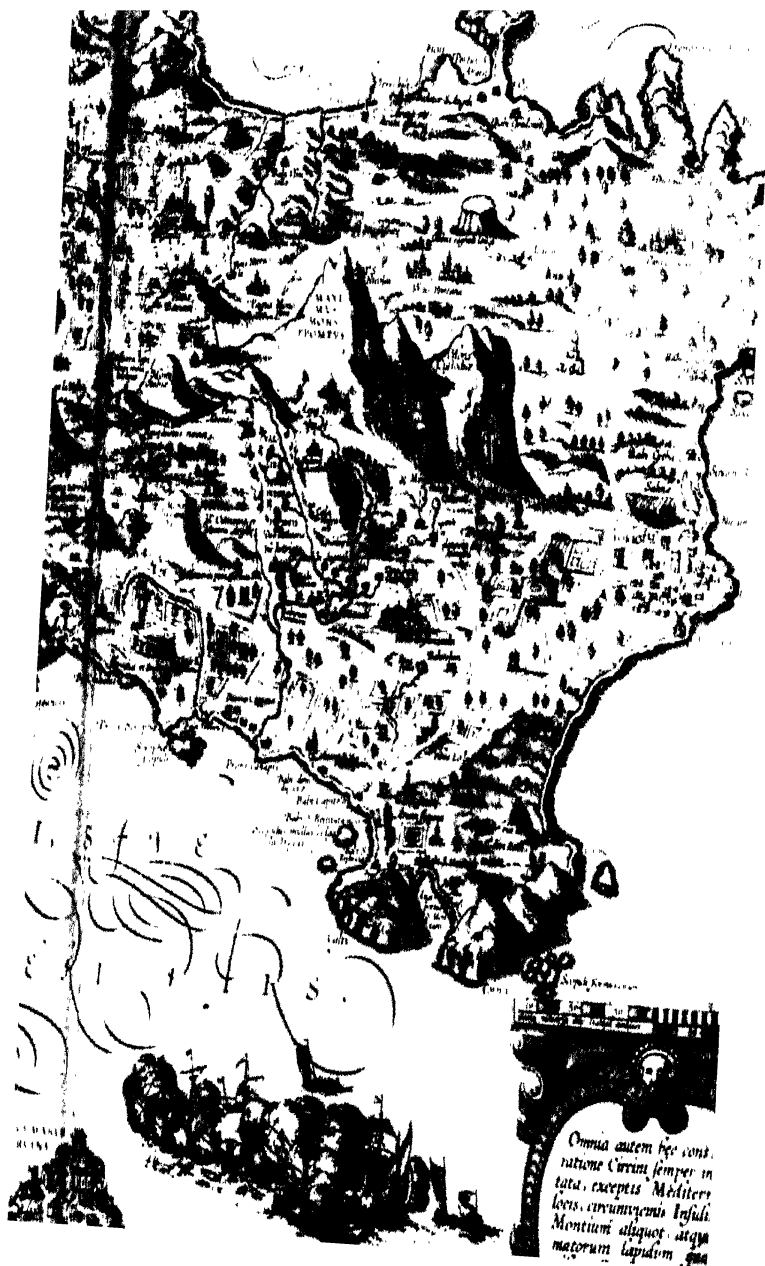


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THE GULF OF PLEASURE

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THE GULF OF PLEASURE

★

BY ALAN ROSS

★

GEORGE WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON LTD

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Note

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London 1950

ALAN ROSS

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Part One

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DESCRIPTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

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Ischia

By six, with a grey-blue light moving off the deserted quay, Naples still hung under a thick haze. As night receded, the pall of smoke from the waterfront was already taking its place. Out at sea a mauve bandage of mist blindfolded the islands.

A few boats were moored to the jetties, small, white-painted steamers of varying sizes that made daily trips to the islands—some to Capri, some to Procida and Ischia, and some south to Sorrento. At the moment they lay motionless on the green, oily water, silent under their awnings as occasional birds flew heavily on to the rainbow patches of oil that surrounded them. Above the cobbled quay the yellow and pink-washed houses stretched up the hillside behind, the morning light breaking into the privacy of their sleep, probing the black holes of windows. Inside them the gradual comprehension of another day sifted thousands of minds, turned over thousands of bodies that resisted it and faced away to the walls. The familiar strings of drudgery tugged at them with a nostalgia for what was not there; in stained tenements where dirt was closer than a friend; in one-night rooms where the wallpaper was less strange than the adjacent body; in flats where men and women opened reluctant eyes to an allegiance no longer desired, yet who could never break away.

Along the Via Marina, up the Via Duomo and along the Corso Umberto, discarded fruit and rubbish festered with flies as the sweepers moved along brushing up the dirt. Along the waterfront, sailors and dockworkers stopped at the Bar Rosa for coffee before going back to their ships. Girls with brown, dirt-stained legs hung about with their dresses half-unbuttoned and shifted chewing-gum from their gold-filled teeth. From the tenement balconies women padded about in nightdresses or

shook brooms over the decaying square. The crumbling stone of the Castel Nuovo seemed to close up on itself.

On the cobbled stones of the quay a solitary policeman exercised his dog.

We left in the smallest of the boats at eight-fifteen. Like a Thames river boat, it had one funnel and awnings along its whole length. By the time we sailed, about thirty or forty passengers had come on board, mostly middle-aged peasant couples with children; a cargo of ice had been already piled in the hold.

The journey to Ischia is about eighteen miles and takes almost exactly two hours. We came slowly out into the bay past British submarines and an enormous American aircraft-carrier, its decks black with aircraft, while sailing boats and launches came past us all the time and Naples grew larger and cleaner as we got further away. It is nearly always a mistake to enter ports: they should be preserved on the mind's periphery as they are on the sea's, beautiful and chaste, full of promise and illusion. Every moment, as the boat turned, Naples, like a restless creature in the morning heat, stretched out some new promontory, flexing and unflexing lines of dazzling white houses and sand, like muscles.

The water became Pernod-green, gradually changing from electric to ink blue, emerald to turquoise. Ischia and Capri lie at opposite ends of the arms that form the Bay of Naples, and going north-west to Ischia the mainland drags beaches dotted with pink and yellow buildings along the shore, while to port the sea stretches out to a horizon that spills, ever so gently, backwards and forwards from the sky. Fishing boats drift with their oars folded, like wings of birds, asleep on the satisfied water.

The boat altered course westward, following the northern

arm of the bay, and leaving it for the open sea. A thick smoky-purple bandage of haze still blotted out visibility beyond more than about five miles and extended over Naples, so after a while, behind us, only the upper contours of the mountains could be seen, like suspended effigies, high over the hidden town. Somewhere Pompeii, Amalfi, Sorrento, refracted sun off their bony, white stone. But the world of ordinary people had been rubbed out in between.

We gradually pushed the haze away in front of us. The sun began to slant hotly under the awnings, mixing with the heat of the engines. Men began to lie out on the benches asleep.

Then at about a quarter to ten the islands came into view. There was now nothing of the land to be seen; at last all one's ties had been cut. A minute break had been made in continuous time, like forcing open a circle of wire that would gradually close again. In that space, life, a past and future, could be reassessed. The untidy ends, the stray garments, of involved relationships might sort themselves out. In the idle, scrutinised impact of natural living, an emotional holiday task would possibly accomplish itself. For one's isolated, exaggerated problems, the sea would be an unction; the noise of cicadas the noise of personal history.

The boat blew its siren. The sleepers got up and stretched themselves. The green, pock-marked hills rose up out of the water in front of us, deeply indented; first Procida like a small prehistoric animal, in its belly a fabulous, glittering port, a cluster of soft, pink-domed houses curling away from a beach where waves broke lazily in powdered edges and scanty olive trees emerged nosily from terraced vines—then Vivara, a hump of scraped, green rock, tonsured with trees, a house perched near its summit, and, beyond, much larger, Ischia, where a skeleton castle stood out from the island at the end of a narrow promontory.

We went past a beach with parasols dotted over burning

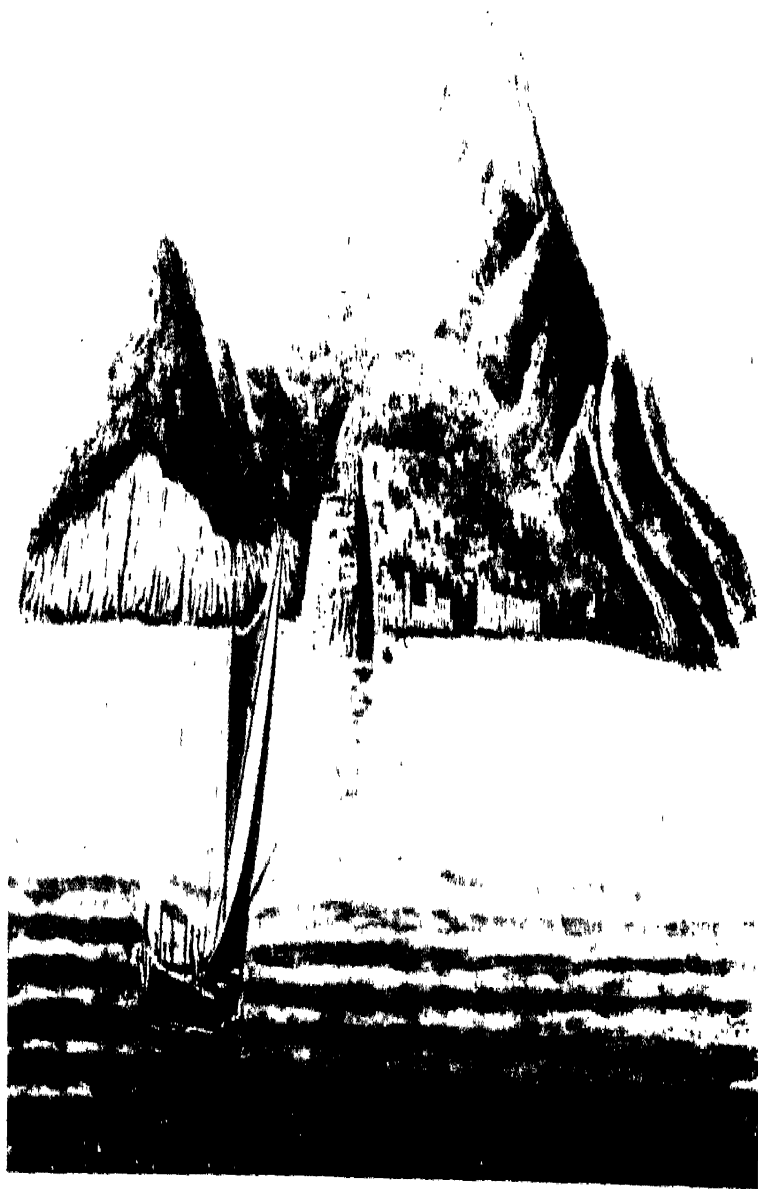
sand, behind which white, flat-roofed villas were half hidden in pine trees; then we turned sharply round a lighthouse into the port itself.

The sun was already hot, almost straight overhead. We nosed through the narrow entrance of the bottle-shaped harbour into a practically circular waterfront. Very neat and compact, clean, pink and blue houses ran almost down to the water's edge. Nets were stretched out over practically the whole quay, where a dozen or so fishing boats, a steam cargo, and a few smart launches were tied up. A group of brightly-dressed people waited at the barrier. Layers of different green—lemon, olive, vine—stretched in tight, pubic curls up the mountain that lay immediately behind the port, and a road bordered with pink and white oleander wound up over the hill to the right.

PORTO D'ISCHIA

Porto d'Ischia is immediately remarkable for its cleanness. Unlike most Mediterranean harbours, where aesthetic and sanitary criteria jockey uncomfortably and where decay and filth usually predominate in the end, Porto d'Ischia has a scrubbed beauty—swept roads, with shrubs and small trees standing like formal schoolgirls at neat intervals and modern villas squatly symmetrical with the blush of planned flower gardens on them. The port town is fairly recent, a gradual and sliding development from the original site on the rock where the derelict castle now stands. Two decisive events have shaped Ischia's growth—a volcanic eruption in the fourteenth century and an earthquake in the early nineteenth. The latter destroyed a large part of the north of the island. The new town has the air of being created for pleasure. The mile road that joins it to the older part at the foot of the castle is flanked by modern seaside shops and hotels; below these, neon-lit bars and cafés under faded awnings reach down to the beach. At night, coloured lamps divide up the street so that discs of illumination





Ischia. The Castle and Monte Epomeo

—green, peach, pink—move over the rows of people like so many moons into whose orbits they endlessly walk.

A porter carried our cases to the Regina Hotel, set back from the beach in a pinewood. The noise of the cicadas was deafening. It is a noise to which one grows quickly accustomed, like music or waterfalls, and only notices, irritated, when it stops. Then, almost like a heart-beat, life seems to stop with it. It is like some mechanical defect that upsets our whole equilibrium. We grow increasingly uneasy until it starts again. Now, as we walked through freshly-washed streets, past up-turned café tables and piazzas being cleared of the night's refuse, the cicadas were a shrill acclamation of arrival. The pinewoods surrounded the hotel like a cordon; inside, it was hospital-clean with white-coated waiters, like internes, pushing trolleys over rubber-lined floors. Holiday had already taken on a therapeutic air.

The sea was just visible from the balcony that joined all the rooms, a thin strip like blue velvet, and after three days' travelling it only seemed one more fatal mirage.

What do we look for from holidays? Sensual refinement? A reservoir of imagery? Time to examine the myth of our crammed and functional lives? Our need alters with the contemporary situation. One moment we try to disengage the fur from dulled palates, the next, neurotic with austerity, we crave for the exotic. Now I wanted the primitive, sensuous re-alignment of work and pleasure. The island as a self-supporting entity, a sanatorium, a pleasure-ground and an occupation in one. A littoral on which one could steady oneself, observe the coalition and movement of clouds like dreams. Adjust references. See the relation of the magnetic ethical North to true North. Re-examine the pleasure-principle as a moral obligation.

A few fishing boats were drawn up on the beach. Behind

them, protruding from sand, were rows of parasols, under which women turned elegant and inelegant bodies a deeper brown; upholstery in deck-chairs, heavier matriarchal figures gazed out on a world created specially for their demanding observation.

The sea was cool salt, a lotion to plunge one's body in endlessly. The sea-bed glittered like green marble and swimming face under-water the sun made golden squares on the watered-silk weeds—an older, richer civilization that unrolled effortlessly on a crystal beach.

Afterwards on burning sand imprinted with copper footsteps, we lay watching the water ripple like flints in the heat and the haze turn the horizon into a soft blue wool. A gramophone ground out nostalgic Neapolitan tunes from a bar at the pines' edge. We drank iced Cinzano and tried to keep off the flies, endeavouring to disentangle beauty from behind dark glasses. The beach now looked smart and slightly over-bearing; a handful of exquisite bodies and the rest protuberant with comfort, money's tasteless surfeits. The sand was wafer-coloured under an aching-blue sky.

We lunched out of doors, very late, in the shadow of a lemon tree, whose lemons, like delicately-shaped breasts, imprinted their outline on the leaves that protected them.

Food. Everyone lunches late, the meals remorselessly continuing to three or four p.m. In Ischia the food is plentiful, well but not brilliantly cooked, and reasonably varied. After a while the *pasta* has to be discarded, though on even the most fragile-looking Italian girl it seems to have no effect. Our meals conformed to a standard type; risotto, pasta al burro or al sugo, or minestra; aubergines stuffed with eggs or *pizze* (egg, tomato, and sardines made into a pancake); veal or steak or fish (fish rarely because it is so bad), peaches, figs, plums or melon. The local wines are excellent, among the very best in

South Italy. The red seems slightly sharp and raw at first but grows magically to one's palate; the white, particularly the celebrated Epomeo, is smoky, something near to a *Lacrima Christi*.

Under palm trees we waited till the worst of the heat had spent itself. The air from the pinewoods came over like an opiate; some labourers were burning leaves in a clearing and the wood seemed like a church full of incense. Below us the beach had completely emptied; the whole of the sand was now covered with fishermen's nets. Along them, at intervals of a few yards, fishermen squatted, cross-legged, in blue dungarees, striped jerseys and small, flat straw hats. They sewed, with scrupulous care, the fine nylon squares, drawing the mesh like silk stockings, over the lumps of their knuckles. There was something peculiarly erotic in watching it. Rolling up the netting in strips, they carry it draped over their shoulders, walking, five or six of them in single file, so the whole frieze flows across the sand, in the antique ritual of classic figures.

Fishing boats go out across the green skin that settles, like skim on milk, over the sea at dusk. The mauve bandage lifts slightly off the horizon and Vivara and Procida grow nearer, as if on telescopic lenses, the scales of the mainland stretching behind them.

The sun sank, orange and cerise, below Epomeo, the extinguished volcano that dominates the island. We drank iced apéritifs again as the sunset wintered into shadows. The light changed from golden to peach, from blue-grey to green and purple, then darkness hardened out of the smudge that rubbed out the islands. The cicadas, which must have died down in the afternoon, began clamouring again as the cocktail-shakers were brandished for a clientèle fresh from sleep.

At about seven the streets begin to grow full. The café tables fill up with white-coated, sandalled men and brilliantly dressed

women. Everyone looks brown and beautiful. In July and August a good many people come over from Rome, Milan and Turin—better-looking, slimmer and easily distinguishable from the resident Neapolitans. English and American voices insert themselves, like toys, into the rhetorical, ambulatory conversation. The street becomes striped with families, promenading *en famille* in between lines of segregated young men and women. Waiters move expertly in and out of tables with *gelati*, coffee and vermouths; carrozza-drivers crack their whips over their mules, and the sound-track from the open-air Giardino cinema is a crackling montage to conversation.

Salt and sun are make-up on one's skin. Politics, here only slogans on walls, art, here a feeble water-colour, seemed as one read of them in weekly papers, unreal extensions of a lost world. In this drugged, sensual self-sufficiency, one could feel concern, ambition, even desire, begin to peel. Yet even in its immediacy it was a fulfilment, one was aware, only tolerable for a short while.

The necklace of light that hangs behind Procida flashed down the coastline from Sorrento to Baia. During the day one feels isolated—lost in the Mediterranean, but at night the links with the mainland are re-established; and incessantly, till morning, the lights of the islands and Baia flicker amongst the light-houses and beacons that mark the extremities of the bay, while within them, in a ring of their own, the brighter, smaller lights of the fishing boats—the *lampari*—burn their hypnotic patches onto the water.

The fish round the islands are disappointingly poor. They are nearly all small, *sardinelle* or *alici*, mostly head and tail, *lacerte* or *seruzzze*, without any recognizable flavour. Probably because of this the Ischians, except for the poorest, have almost abandoned the 'zuppa di pesce' about whose ingredients Norman

ISCHIA

Douglas wrote in *Siren Land*: 'They have colour and shape, these fish of the inland sea, but not taste; their flesh is either flabby and slimy and full of bones in unauthorized places, or else they have no flesh at all—heads like Burmese dragons but no bodies attached to them; or bodies of flattened construction on the *Magnum in parvo* principle, allowing of barely room for a sheet of paper between their skin and ribs: or a finless serpentine framework, with long-slit eyes that leer at you while you endeavour to scratch a morsel off the reptilian anatomy.'

Even lobster and *scampi* are rarities—so expensive during the brief post-war Anglo-American occupation that only senior American officers were able to afford them regularly.

The disadvantage of Porto d'Ischia is the noise at night. From sunset till midnight the apéritif drinkers, the *gelati* sellers, the carrozza-drivers, compete against the hoarse sound-track of ancient American films. Then, for what seems hours, the noise from the Monkey Bar, Ischia's one *boîte*, spills out into the morning, into the resinous dark slowly turning into pinewoods. Irritatingly enough, it is a noise due almost entirely to an abstemious bonhomie, a garrulousness whose overflow has no relation to our neurotic necessity for the liberating effects of alcohol. To-night when sleep came, it brought a train of unambiguous associations, a frieze of classical and modern figures who conversed on the decks of blue-sailed barques, and full-breasted women, like Roman statues, who unmasked into playing cards above an olive sea.

Ischia is shaped like a tent, with Monte Epomeo in the middle and vine-terraced hills like canvas reaching down to the sea on all sides. The six towns, amongst which the 40,000 inhabitants are distributed, are evenly balanced, with Forio, the biggest town, near the middle of the West coast and Porto d'Ischia in a corresponding position on the East. On the North

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

are the adjoining towns of Lacco Ameno and Casamicciola, and in similar positions, but a mile or so inland, are Serrara Fontana and Barano on the south coast. One good main road connects all these towns, running in a sort of inner circle round the whole island. Communications are good, for there are two or three buses a day that do the whole journey, regular boats that go round all the islands, and sailing boats and motor launches that can easily be hired. There are no points on the island which cannot be reached on foot within three or four hours and the whole island is excellent for walking. In the winter it gets very wet, but now in summer we travel everywhere by boat or walk when we go inland.

On most days a few early clouds lie like cotton wool over the hills and by midday have melted into the hard blue stare that never changes till it softens into the sulphurous tints of sunset. The sun burns straight down over flat white roofs and over vine-scrubbed hills. The sea seems scalding, a boiling grey-blue that smokes itself out on the coast.

This morning we walked to Fiaiano, a small village about a third of the way across the island from Porto d'Ischia, right up in the hills. The narrow, dusty path leads through the pine-woods of La Mandra that cover the whole of the *Lave Dell' Arso*, the great wedge-shaped area, arid till quite recently, which was destroyed by the eruption of 1301. Now it is all planted with trees. A small mule-track runs up at right angles from the main circular road, a track like a dandruffed parting walled with jagged stones out of which lizards detach their surreptitious lengths from lichened crevices, and butterflies—White Admirals, Fritillaries, Clouded Yellows—fly languidly from the dust-coated vines. The vine terraces reach from shore to skyline; the grapes are very small and sour, unsightly in comparison to the olive-trees that originally covered all these hillsides. A poor investment to-day, there is only a skeleton olive industry left. A handful of villas, stone eyes in shabby

green lashes, breaks the monotony of vine and scrub. Most of them are Roman, with wide porticos and pillared balconies, set well into the rock; the vines grow right up to the verandas, the only approach to them through specially hollowed tunnels.

Inland, outlook and landscape blend. The mind and body follow the same seasonal process to maturity as the vine. During the day the sun sucks up vitality like the sweetness of an orange, but at sunset everything is given back. The sea changing from blue to chromium is the only constant, the reference to the world of others—a hardly observed but glittering margin to the rock-centred life of Fiaiano.

Looking down from Fiaiano, the island falls into a natural sweep; a flowing, green-creased canvas flapping at its edges into blue crêpe sea. The village itself, which is rarely visited, is extremely beautiful, quite different from those on the coast. A narrow, cobbled street runs for some two hundred yards of houses, each one of which is freshly whitewashed and hooded with clematis or trellising vines. In each is exhibited, as in a microcosm, a cross-section of the island's export life. The doors all open on the street and walking through it is like going through an Arts and Crafts Exhibition. Small, grey-eyed children with grave, lovely faces, sit on the steps of rooms where bent old women, shapeless in black, weave baskets or turn flax, and men sit in dark, cool caves, working on leather, with the raw smell of wine from barrels stored in rock-vaults drenching the air.

The people of Fiaiano look very different from the fishermen—the men are bigger and better-looking, Greek in appearance, with a solidity and strength the others lack, while the women retain their antique, swaying carriage. Like Hellenic friezes come to life, they walk past in biblical majesty with their water-jugs, their stained brown legs exquisitely certain on the cobbles and their breasts pressing upwards against thin black dresses. Their carriage and their breasts, perhaps more than

anything in these art-less islands, help to create the illusion, now almost lost to Europe, of beauty that is both antique in its origins, and functional in its graces.

On the roofs of the houses tomatoes, cut in half and laid out like hearts in rows or put through a stick and hung up outside doorways, dry in the sun. Two of the larger caves, pasted with pin-up girls and cigarette-cards, act as grocery shops and you can buy there, very cheaply, excellent fresh lemons to squeeze into glasses of crushed ice and mix with sugar; or else aubergines, figs, peaches. Best of all probably are the small, beautifully flavoured pears.

We left in time to have a bathe before lunch. Halfway down the hill, little black-eyed boys came running after us with their hands full of blackberries, which gravely they proffered and gravely we accepted.

The town of Porto d'Ischia is in reality two separate places, different in function, in architecture and in date. The beautiful, circular harbour which was originally completely bounded by rocks and formed a lake, was opened under Bourbon rule in 1853 by cutting away a narrow strip of rock. The whole of the modern town and harbour dates from this period and reflects its twin occupations—fishing and the summer tourist trade. Lovely old two and three-masted fishing boats lie alongside fast, new motorboats and all the way up the hill to the pinewoods, over the Punta San Pietro, villas and hotels, a string of light at night, adjoin one another with terraced gardens dropping their buff edges on the shore. But only here and at Casamicciola is there any impression of a special façade put up for visitors—though it is still, for the moment anyway, unostentatious, and the whole coastfront to the *castello* has a lazy romanticism that the smart beach, and its smoothly-tailored occupants, never quite destroy.

The old town, which is early sixteenth century, has narrow,

honeycomb streets in the Genoese fashion, a special, rather dingy beach of its own—the *Spiaggia dei Pescatori*—and is austere, a little dirtily, beautiful. The houses are painted in delicate washed pink, blue and yellow, a wash which has run down the walls and round the windows into enormous tear-stains. During the heat of the day, its refuse crawling with flies, the narrow alleys fester and smell, but in the evening, when houses glow like peaches, the sea levelled into a meringue-coloured, foamy strip, the whole population, the buildings themselves, seem released. Lights come out singly in windows doubled on water; small bulbs burn over complacent religious effigies inset under leaking harbour walls. Old women, barely visible in the darkness, crouch over their doorsteps, children asleep like weights round them, and the whole length of the narrow bridge to the castle is lined with old fishermen sitting and smoking in silence on the walls, wrinkled clay like their pipes.

At the end of the bridge the Aragonese castle straggles down from the top of an enormous rock, the decaying buildings jutting unsteadily over sheer drops. The castle, even the shell that remains, is magnificently imposing, but a little top-heavy, almost sinister, like too big a head. Approaching it by boat you go over patches of sharp green water with rocks laid out like continents, needing constant attention, just below the surface. The water immediately under the raw, dun-coloured hump of rock is extremely deep and of a startling transparency—so that, looking down, one seems to be invading its privacy, too close to its naked depths. Landing, you enter under a small bridge tacked on the end of the causeway that joins the old port onto the *castello*. The road up is steep and winding, going through tunnels lit with electric candles that burn over images of saints with faces like tailors' dummies; then the tunnels branch into rooms on either side, strewn with rusted tins and straw, the floorboards rotting, but with sea spread out in thick

blue-green streamers below and the mauve shapes of Capri and Procida, like ships at anchor, visible through the slit windows.

Little of the original castle, built by Alphonso I of Aragon, still remains. The walls have nearly all crumbled away and the church, with its various painted crypts and decorated chapels, is completely derelict. Some of the early crude murals are still visible under networks of breaking plaster, somewhat extravagantly claimed by the Ischians as Michelangelo's, because of the latter's friendship with Vittoria Colonna. Some of these murals, simple illustrations, in a powdery blue and gold, of religious themes, are nevertheless fascinating. Much more to the taste of the caramel-headed boys who show one round are the rooms where aged nuns of a resident order came down to die. There are two adjoining stone crypts, in the walls of which are seats cut into the rock. On these the nuns who thought their hour had come, sat and waited for death. When it struck they were moved into an adjoining vault, in view of the others, where the skeletons of their predecessors lay. In the semi-darkness, small piles of bones lay carefully arranged round the walls, occasionally upset where mongrel-dogs had dragged a crunched femur into the light of day.

The only contemporary interest of the castle is its history, a microcosm of the history of Ischia. It was built in the middle of the fifteenth century, about a hundred and fifty years after the final unification of Ischia with Naples. Before this the island underwent a series of occupations; the Saracens and Pisans in the ninth and twelfth centuries, then later the Emperors Henry VI and Frederick II. The castle's prime fascination is, however, romantic—as the birthplace of Ferdinando Francesco d'Avalos, Marchese di Pescara, the great Italian General, hero of Ravenna and Pavia. Pescara died of wounds in Milan in 1525 and his beautiful poet wife, Vittoria Colonna, spent the rest of her life in the castle where her husband had been born. It is almost

impossible to imagine a more romantic setting for one of the great love stories in Italian history—for in its isolation, its remote beauty that is a prey to every force of weather, its superb view over the whole gulf of Naples down to Sorrento, the Castello d'Ischia is created in the proportions of heroic legend.

Vittoria Colonna's years of mourning here came to symbolize for future generations '*l'amor divino*'—the spiritualization of love as a counterpart to the cynical marital infidelity of Renaissance Italy. Vittoria herself, not only in her relationships with Castiglione and Michelangelo, but in her general enslavement of what Burckhardt calls 'the most famous men in Italy', created and projected a myth by her unattainability—which inspired a respect and adoration almost unknown outside literature. Essentially, Vittoria Colonna was the embodiment of literary idealism; the symbolic heroine placed on a pinnacle by circumstance and whose romantic position was too noble to be jeopardized by familiarity. The physical passion that her beauty and gifts must otherwise have produced, became transformed through its legendary quality into the essential of romantic love, at a level on which only yearning and idealization were able to predominate.

Coming out of the damp vaults in the castle, where empty wells open up suddenly and alarmingly at one's feet, into the bright sunlight, the sense of life takes a great leap forward—the tenuous links of history dissolve into blue bays of pleasure, and rough, long grasses bend back at the rocks' edge like straw-coloured hair under the wind's flourishes.

San Montano is a beach on the extreme north-west edge of the island. The coast-road takes about two hours to walk, as we did to-day, though usually we take a boat over to Lacco Ameno, which is the nearest town. The road, which is excellent—perhaps because there is so little traffic, hardly a dozen cars on the whole island—follows the coast the whole way along,

winding over cliff-edges and round bays with miniature silver beaches over which the sea crinkles at the edges like green cellophane. The hills rise sheer above you on your left, Epomeo like a turret, a lathe dominating the other peaks which from different turns in the road look nearly as high. Alternating pink and white oleander trees line the road as far as Casamicciola. At intervals up the hillside villas, like white stones embedded in the coarse green plush of the undergrowth, look out over the Gulf of Naples with the commanding vantage-points of boxes in a theatre.

After an hour's walk Casamicciola stretches out on the left of the coast road, a quarter of a mile of houses heaving themselves gradually from level to level. You pass a line of shops selling fish, mussels, baskets and post-cards, which comes to an end in an L-shaped piazza with two or three bars and tables set amongst flowers. On one side a few carriages blister under palm-trees, behind them the beach; on the other a road rises sharply up to hill-villages, and to various, strategically-placed, hotels. A lighthouse like a pepper-pot stretches up at the end of the stone jetty to which the boats come in every day from the other islands or from the mainland on their way out to Ventotene and San Stefano, the prison islands halfway to the Ponzas, suitably black-painted steamers with yellow funnels that carry away a flutter of white roofs in a green cheese-shaped bay as their last look at life.

There were striped parasols up on the beach; a few people lay out in their shade or idly watched fisher-boys diving continuously off the pier and coming up like wet toffees. We walked past them under cliffs with caves reaching right into the rock, their entrances barred with huge, bolted doors, and made into wine-cellars. Further along the sand merged into a rubbish dump for old oil-drums, as though the effort to carry through the picture postcard effect had given way to sudden inertia. Half a mile away and round one more headland the

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buildings of Lacco Ameno, a fishing village about half the size of Casamicciola, spread out at the foot of Monte Vico, the old Greek capital of the island. We stopped and bought some melon and peaches, and had a drink in a wine-shop. A few hundred yards out to sea a large rock, like a mushroom-shaped fungus, sticks out of the water and acts as a raft for swimmers, an interim harbour for the rowing boats going out to wait for the daily mail steamer. The inhabitants embroider a myth about an underwater house attached to it, due, they say, to a building falling into the sea during one of the many coastal landslides.

We walked up past the square of Santa Restituta—the patron saint of Ischia—with its piazza of pink buildings, its most beautiful third-century church with Byzantine decorations and murals, and its thermal baths to which people still come, hobbling in off the boats from Naples.

San Montano, which is the other side of Monte Vico, has the best bathing, though not the biggest beach, in the island. You reach it through a path shadow-boxed by enormous cacti, rows and rows of them, unlike nearly all the others in Ischia, which are sparse and stunted. Then a great expanse of sable beach breaks out from under olive trees, nearly deserted, with a few thatched, African-looking, huts above it, and two or three boats drawn up on the sand.

The water like green, skimmed milk, its unrolling like the lapping of a dog's tongue. Hot springs bubble up all day long under the sand. Even the sea burns, the bay split into parallel strips of boiling and cold water. Images are all sensory, objects becalmed. Sensation grinds itself into nothing. A handful of people, a bar with iced drinks, and half a mile of sand. Make the most of the sea; filter the sun like money through your fingers; watch the oil be sucked through the pores of your skin. Are the images of pleasure communicable? Think offhand of a good book about happiness. Or does the individual only

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

become creative out of remorse or nostalgia or moral purpose: Literature is the irritant, philosophy the pearl. Yet the individual in contemporary society is forced into a political rôle; static, self-occupied, nihilistic, he is only biologically interesting, a microbe on a slide. The crushed-blue sky becomes a kind of mockery. The palms wave petrified arms on a burnished sky-line.

We left when the sun had gone behind the mountain, stopping to drink glasses of iced wine in cellars on the way back. The shadows stretched out bonily from the trees, flat on the mauve sea; by the time we reached the hill above the harbour of Porto d'Ischia the water in the port was the colour of wine, with sunset running through it.

I read in the mornings on a terrace facing the pines. Away from the beach, there is scarcely any noise; only the cicadas. At intervals girls go by carrying jugs or baskets on their heads, and for a moment my attention is distracted to follow their vase-like figures swinging through dappled paths out of sight. A blue chink of sea is just visible over the fringe of trees and occasionally, when I look up, white sails are curled like irises over the water.

A carriage clatters by, the driver flicking his whip over the mule; now a tiny donkey, the size of a dog, draws an enormous load into town. Nothing else. Towards noon we go and bathe, dry out in the sun, drink a Cinzano, and lunch about two.

The streets empty after lunch, though sometimes a priest can be heard toiling up to the school where they teach. The only signs of life are shopkeepers fanning themselves on chairs outside their shops, humped at strange angles like dolls with the sawdust running out of them.

Once it was possible to live permanently like this—with no more diversion than the season's gradual changing. But now

memory has grown brittle—a cracked glass that a lack of security, our sense of guilt towards ourselves, has made us unable to face. Afraid the mechanisms of endurance might break down, we strive perpetually to keep moving, to do anything to avoid the bitter show-down with our abilities. But in the end the means we employ corrupt us. We are even deprived, through no fault of our own, of isolation, the writer's last excuse in his struggle to defer his own pleasure in the act of writing. So though we have facets of character that others know us by, we no longer recognize ourselves. *Becoming* all the time, we never simply *are*. The characteristics of the landscape round us change so rapidly that we have no known frontiers. We cannot formalize our experience because its nature alters before we have time to understand it. Art needs, above all else, definable limits, even if they are only the limits of its own creation. The artist no longer creates an indestructible world from the anonymous forces running through him. The undercurrents of his comprehension are already clichés before he is ready to use them.

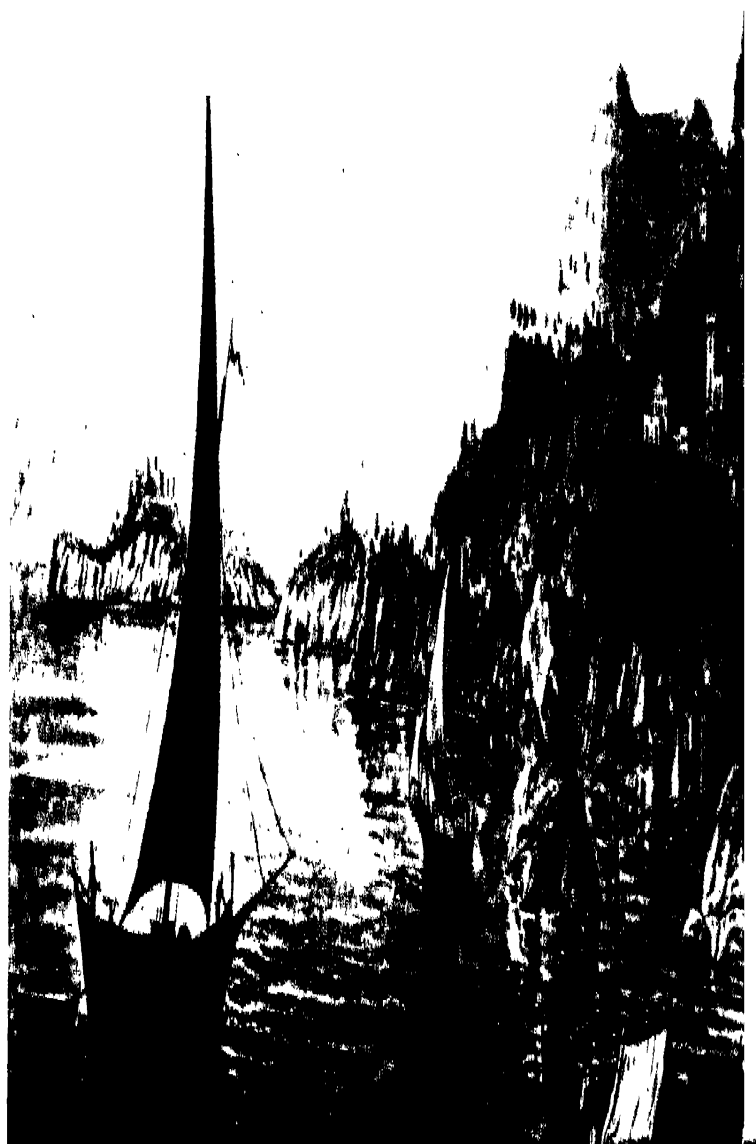
At night, the waterfront crushes out the day's heat on its stone transfer. Through the renovation of sunset the water changes colour as you look at it; the houses all round bloom, growing gradually haggard into a wrinkled rouge; then darkness obliterates age and only a mesh of stars draws out the limits of sea, mountains and sky. Every so often a boat slips out, its powerful light probing the sea immediately in front. Inland, people simply sit—immobile, historical figures existing more in traditional conceptions than as individuals. Abstractions that register and convey the human essentials of resignation, suffering, contemplation, they become part of the night, growing deeper and deeper into it. Lighted windows outline the silhouettes of men playing *scopa*—the card-game that like a ritual involving human destiny goes on all day—while, below,

women sit fanning themselves on doorsteps, worn beauties replete in a kind of timeless benediction.

One is conscious all the time of classical form in modern dress. Women seem the perpetuation of paintings, the various embodiments of female beauty that Firenzuola catechized so precisely in the sixteenth century. Yet to-day the illusion of purity, coupled so often in practice with extreme sensuality, has vanished with the cult of the contemporary woman, whose freedom of movement has taken beauty out of the *salon*, an art of pastiche, into the natural air of sea and beaches. The pursuit of brown, suntanned skin has brought with it the unaffected elegance of healthiness, a physical assertiveness of the body that destroys the sense of wickedness, the sense of evil so fascinating under demure exteriors. For as sex grows more natural, so does it become correspondingly less attractive.

Afternoon. Two girls play with a huge, striped ball on the beach, stumbling and falling over the uneven sand like colts. Hair corn-coloured, wind-tossed; legs whose muscles are still insecure, a prey to the sinews' impulse. A yacht keels over like a dancer on skates; the sea arches its back as waves, the colour of pound-notes, break like tissue. The bay seems to wheel in a light wind, the islands plaques on an unsettled compass.

Scrubbed and vine-scratched hills stretch out behind, a jagged scar running across the blueness, from which clusters of trees detach themselves, a thin corps-de-ballet along the skyline. On sea level the heat shimmers, almost hallucinatory, isolating us in sudden oases of calm. Every kind of impact—the undertones of voices, the resinous perfume of pine, the hooters of liners in the gulf—becomes muted in the glass wall the heat has built up. The individual is no longer personally concerned in what happens, protected by this glass partition. Whatever





Ischia. Ponte

rubbs against it seems an intrusion, a siren-call to reality—an aeroplane like a silver, humming eyelid, fidgety mosquitoes, the dipping of honey-coloured oars.

We sailed over this evening to the Grotto del Mago. At about six the heat begins to slacken and there are two clear hours of activity before dark. We turned out past the pinewoods, the *spiaggia dei pescatori* and the old town, rinsed and lovely now at sunset, then through the small gap between the causeway and the *castello*. The water, like cut-glass, is quartered like a chart on the sea bed. We edged through rocks, past fishing boats and beyond the pier under the crumbling cliffs of Sant' Anna. The original tower on the edge of the cliff, like so many Ischian buildings, has crumbled away into the sea, leaving a slither of grey rock. There is barely an islander—particularly a fisherman—who has not lost, at some time or another, one of his relatives in a landslide or cliff accident.

The very pretty, isolated beach at Sant' Anna, is only reachable by boat, for the rocks come sheer down to the shingle, cultivated to the very edge with vines. The whole way along the coast, on straggling, awkward pieces of cliff, on jutting headlands, you see olive trees and precarious but neatly terraced vines so that not a foot of land is wasted anywhere.

After about an hour the rocks become increasingly indented—great fissures have cut some of the cliffs in half, so they protrude at alarming angles and everywhere the rough volcanic surface looks as though some huge hand had grasped the lava while it was still hot and clenched it up like plasticine.

The Grotto del Mago is the biggest of the coastal caves—big enough to stand up in the boat as you take it through. It widens out inside, the rock dripping like a submerged cathedral, the water underneath a glittering blue ink as if lit from below, and then, some twenty yards further in, a tiny channel takes you right into the middle of the cliff where the rocks reach down to

two feet above sea-level, and in the sticky darkness nothing is visible except the O, like a pencil-sharpener, of the entrance.

Inside, a silence of magnified echoes. Only the rocks' constant dripping seems to rehearse implications beyond the stone itself. A plumb-line is established between the earth's crust and the earth's centre, which no centrifugal force could ever resolve; the weight of the world above presses down through the rock to the infinite resistance of the water, like some philosophical stalemate that had only this thin, barely recognizable channel of egress as its possible solution.

We came out into the sunset. The dazzle had gone out of the sea, and the sky smoked over the smouldering ashes of Vivara and Procida. Through a blue-grey smudge the uneven humps of Capri tilted like a foundering ship.

The stars hardened into bits of cut-out tinfoil as we came back under a following breeze. By the time we reached the old waterfront the moon was splashed across our bows, a chromium sash behind the pinewoods which we moved into as we rounded the cape and tied up on the jetty. The gramophone was playing in the small bar at the edge of the pines and we drank two quick Martinis before going back to change.

Soon after midnight I awoke, to lie naked and restless under the open window. The heat was something one could feel like a sponge. The cicadas had grown suddenly quiet; only the occasional buzzing of a mosquito came through the breathing darkness. The moonlight caught the end of the wall near the balcony and sitting up in bed I could see the sea-glitter thrown backwards and forwards as if in a chain net. A reasonless nervous intensity made sleep impossible. Thoughts followed one another to dissolve noiselessly like bubbles at the moment of formulation.

I watched the night tick its way into dawn. Under a wafer-thin layer of sleep, a factory of ideas ground itself out.

ISCHIA

Then suddenly, through the half-open shutters, my eyes opened to the ruled blue of the bay.

Afternoon. A day spent reading Byron's letters. Already autumn seems to have insinuated a nostalgia and regret into the landscape. Or is it only imagination, a premonition that comes from watching the fishermen wind up sunset in their nets? The beach is still like a picture postcard. The gulf like a child's model. History, in whatever aspect, has barely touched these islands. Summer islands, play-pens for Emperors, or tyrants, or the merely rich, their frivolous outlines make serious alteration to their character impossible. They are without art or even proportion; immune from monuments and architectural deviations; untouched by political or cultural slumps. Their assets—sea, sand, sun. Comparative isolation. A certain quality of light.

CASAMICCIOLA

We have the gulf on a new bearing. Procida and Vivara are hidden behind the Punta della Scrofa and, opposite us, the Bay of Gaeta, with Cape Miseno to our right, makes the distance from the mainland seem much further. The bay dazzles and glitters, a sieve of blue splinters beyond which the thin froth of sand and surf off Gaeta squeeze themselves out like ectoplasm at sea level. Only up here, on the scrubbed hillside, can one see where the mauve coastline actually reaches the water. Named, according to Virgil, after Aeneas' nurse, Caieta, Gaeta is a compact town of alleyways and cobbled streets situated like Naples in relation to its bay, but from here some five miles away, only a blur, a china glitter under buff hills.

Casamicciola has a main street, bordered with oleander and palms, running in a straight line along the sea's edge. On the landward side, several hundred yards of shops, every fifth or sixth separated by narrow lanes running up and losing them-

selves in the hills, curve round eventually into a piazza, so that the whole town is L-shaped—an effect increased by the pier that runs out from the main square some hundred yards into the sea.

The piazza itself has three or four cafés facing each other uneasily through trees, a taxi rank and a space for carriages. From here everything and everybody can be, and are, observed; the two or three daily 'buses, the Naples steamer, the arrival of fishing vessels and motorboats. Beyond the quay, the small bathing beach, a litter of upturned boats and oil drums, trails off into untidy shacks and rocks, while the road curves round a slight point, under cliffs hollowed into wine cellars, towards Lacco Ameno.

Each Ischian town has a bay of its own, a ridge of hills, and a headland that separates them from one another. So that though none of them are more than five miles apart—most of them about two—they seem each to have a distinctive atmosphere, a private character.

Casamicciola stands geographically and characteristically half-way between Porto d'Ischia and Forio, the East and West of the island. It is neither smart nor neglected; it caters for tourists, has a number of hotels dotted like blanked-out eyes at various levels up the hillside, but manages to avoid the appearance of a resort. The town has a permanent, rather engaging, off-season quiet, increased by the distance between villas and hotels, each of which is muffled in its own gardens and vineyards. There are three good hotels, the Bellavista, the Suisse and the Pithecusa, all of them overlooking the harbour, with the town set out below like a model stage. But probably the best view of all comes from the Villa Ibsen (where Ibsen wrote *Peer Gynt* at the same time as Boecklin was living in Casamicciola)—a rambling white building with flowers growing up all over it, a rose garden and trellised terrace, under which the

whole bay—sea, town, quayside—hardens into clarity like a Canaletto.

Waking is effortless, a surfacing to light. Through the shuttered window, an already hot sun turns the room into an aquarium—rippling patches of aqueous, honey light. We breakfast on the terrace; coffee, brown bread, a boiled egg and figs. By eight o'clock the sun has begun to glint below us, the sea already feverish as if throbbing. The sky is a pale rinsed blue. In the bay, a few sailing boats seem to have settled like butterflies, hardly moving. The fishing boats have already been in for some hours, and now the first mail steamer is off Baia on its way to Porto d'Ischia. Below, in the town, we can see the fruit stalls being set up along the main street; the waiters washing down the exact areas of pavement outside their cafés; chairs being put out in the Giardino restaurant. The roads are a blur of pomegranates, mussels, water-melon and oleander. From where we are, we sense, rather than hear, the noise of people on the quay and the sellers outside their stalls. Occasionally, as if a door in between were being opened and shut, a gust of noise comes up with the heat from below. Or else voices ring out clear and sharp like gunfire across the flat water. Life at sea-level seems foreshortened, stereoscopic. Each new day promises nothing more than itself.

Reading Burckhardt under a lemon tree at the edge of the garden. Rows of grapes are staked out for about fifty yards all round. All the hotel wine is made on the premises, though it is still a little early for picking and pressing. In another three weeks the whole island will seem to move, the pickers working their way up the hillsides, starting from the bottom; then the air feels as if it has been drenched with a wine-spray and the ground itself seems to be bubbling, unable to contain itself any longer.

At midday we walk over to San Montana to bathe. Going

through Lacco we met Raffael, the local postman. He is one of the few genuine 'characters' on the island—habitually drunk, always scrupulously polite, very cultured in appearance. A straw hat is squashed over battered, soggy features which still preserve, like the half-obliterated head on a coin, outlines of nobility—a Wodehouse character somehow turned renegade, a gentleman's gentleman broken loose. By late afternoon, when the main post of the day comes in, he is usually beyond carrying out his duties and goes, or is carried, home singing and blowing his whistle, a satchel of undelivered mail on his shoulder. He wakes very early and begins his delivery-round before dawn. By then his head has cleared, and, filled with the elixir of a new day's drinking ahead of him, he stops at every house, whether they have mail or not, to blow his whistle as a reconciliatory, social gesture. Calise, too, is practically always in the shop—effusive, good-natured, a stock caricature Italian who has done his time on the New York sidewalks, and now, retired to his native village, talks nostalgically and unceasingly about Manhattan. We sit with them sometimes in the evening, watching the white lights come out on the hillside as the noise of day fades into the calm, night surf. Then Raffael is mercilessly encouraged by Calise, one child egging on another, to drink more and more until he can only giggle and blow out his cheeks like a whale, while Calise, in his Italian-American, outlines his plans for a salted herring industry to make his own and everybody else's fortune. Only native apathy, the reluctance of provincial people to take a risk, he says, is holding it up.

We buy our lunch at Lacco—ham, white wine, grapes, a loaf of brown bread—then lie on the nearly empty Montana beach till dusk. The sea is a thick olive-green, like a Chirico, the headlands on either side like darker weights on the water. The waves seem hardly to break on the coppery sand; looking upwards the sky is a helmet, its blue face blank with ennui, with a

surfeit of idleness. The green sea spills in the corner of one's eye.

At sunset, when for a whole hour the sky burns itself out from an oystered shell, we return along the sea road. The dust has settled, leaving one free to breathe. And, what one has not noticed before, the sun has an effect of noise. When it goes down an enormous persuasive silence flowers over the landscape. The daily catharsis. Outside the Church of Santa Restituta two nuns flutter through the Piazza, their starched cuffs reproaches against the soft pink of the villas, the derelict over-decorated baths. People still come, however, to do cures—old, leathery peasants doubled like hairpins, men as notched as the sticks they lean on. The waters in Casamicciola are some of the best in the island. In the evening the patients walk about in striped linen pyjamas, conspicuous as inhabitants of a concentration camp. There are three main baths supplied from the *gurgitello*, a thermal spring of 135° Fahrenheit—The *Manzi*, *Belliazzi*, and then, at the far end of the town, the *Monte della Misericordia* for the very poor.

Walking through the town, traces of the earthquake of 1883 are still visible. Something like three thousand people were killed, nearly as many wounded, in a few seconds. Behind the main street a feathery line of crushed stone stretches, through bare patches of hill, to the centre of the island. In winter, when the trees are leafless, the hillside ripples bonily through rows of skeleton vines.

Every evening at sunset between Lacco and Casamicciola, a pair of cows are brought down to the beach. The village customers come at intervals with jugs, waiting while the patient cows are milked into their different-sized containers. The sky alters behind them, the sea spilling into a darker grey at their feet. The milk susurrates, hissing into froth from rich

udders and singing against the tin jugs, till, as night falls, the cows are led away, broodingly indifferent, up the hill.

The damask evening gathers, like a sudden growth of darkness, behind the town. The piazza smells a little of incense, of stale leaves. The groups of people thicken into clots sitting at tables. Past them rows of young girls walk ceaselessly, fluttering rose handkerchiefs from their wrists, trails of perfume mixing with the dry sweat of old labourers on benches. The tables fill up; women dark and purposive under thin, bright dresses; men with the *Corriere della Sera* propped up on coffee-pots; Swiss matrons and old Italian dowagers gossiping; a kind of link established through newspapers and conversation with the past or the outside world. And subtly pervasive of everything, an undercurrent of desire, like an electric tension, is transmitted from women to men, at present so unconcerned and separate.

Festa della Santa Maria Maddalena. To-day it has been cloudy for the first time. A southerly wind has whipped the bay into a frothy, olive-coloured mass, changing the whole aspect of the island. Occasionally the sun threw wintry splinters of light through the sky's masonry. Without heat, the landscape's human qualities, indolence, self-sufficiency, the feeling of leisure, collapse; stripped of them an air of unease settles over the inhabitants, as though some faculty, necessary for the business of living, was missing. The island seemed suddenly bleak, a northern outpost of variegated greens and stiff foliage.

The beaches have been empty, only a few boats bobbing indeterminately off the Punta di Scrofa. The routine mail-boat, normally met by small dinghies and swimmers, came in alone and unmolested. No other boats came in all day. A large, black-sailed fishing smack dwarfed the sallow quay, round which the port below seemed silent and derelict. The noise of sunlight, the scissoring of cicadas, the simmer of sea

and rock, were absent, as if short-circuited. It emphasised how much the island's whole life and landscape were animated by sun, like a battery—when it was out, hope went with it, and even time seemed no longer a benediction. The empty hours were like dead skin that people absentmindedly scraped off in an enforced idleness.

During the day there were various explosions in different parts of the island and in Procida. The amount of noise made during a *festa* indicates the degree of pleasure the people wish to give to their Saint. The structure of Ischia, its rocky crags and hollows, makes the slightest sound, the most anaemic fire-work, echo like a thunder clap. It would not, one imagined, be difficult amongst these reverberating valleys to propitiate the most implacable of deities.

At about six in the evening a band began to play in the piazza. The wind was still strong and caught the music in gusts, at one moment blowing it up like a balloon, at another buffeting it into silence. In the dull light a crowd began to form in procession behind a priest, who emerged from the church at the head of a small choir. The priest and choir carried torches, and at various places down the main street lit flares which bubbled up, flickering and bellying like sails in the wind's eddies. They circled the piazza several times, singing as they lit huge oil-stoups spaced out on the sea-front. Then, retracing their steps along the line of raffia shops, past fish-mongers, fruiterers, and bars, they regrouped under Boecklin's statue in the square, the whole town aflame round them.

At moments the air burned and bellowed with music and flames; at others the wind engulfed the whole piazza in its embrace, putting out brass band, choir and procession like a hose. As it grew darker the flames were extinguished and the waterfront floodlit; the jetty and black-sailed smack were outlined in glittering diamond lights against the sea. The procession began to wind back to the Church, returning by small

streets behind the town, the muffled singing floating disembodiedly and losing itself like smoke on the hillside.

The wind dropped during dinner, leaving the air heavy and fevered. The *festa* was being held in a village near the top of the hill, and by half-past nine a stream of people were wandering in groups up the narrow, dark lane towards the hidden blur of brassy music. At the entrance to the village a great tiara of light hung over the road. On either side neon lights burned at foot intervals along telegraph wires. Wax images of Christ, hung with flowers, were inset into flared cupolas in the walls and illuminated by concealed bulbs. Pictures of Santa Maria Maddalena, pieces of melon, stalls with rattles and fireworks, chromium cribs and model mangers, bars of thick, gluey *torrone*, figs, balloons, rosettes, neckties, were, in the name of the Virgin, hawked noisily at the village gates, while above, on a flat piece of wasteground, a band played on a decorated *daïs*, whose lights flickered, wildly out of control, in private formulas of their own. Sometimes the musicians were plunged into total darkness, the majority abandoning their music, to take up playing guiltily as lonely trumpets struggled on inaccurately like drowning swimmers blowing for life. Then the lights would suddenly revive, leaving the bandmaster, like an inadequate referee, to fix an arbitrary place in the score and rally his orchestra into more courageous unison.

We bought *torrone* and melon, sitting down to eat them on the low walls of a bend, inside which the road swung out of a dried-up ravine vertically up the hill. Every few minutes fireworks unfolded in umbrellas of pink, green and violet, suddenly clamping out to leave the black sky empty. More people arrived, from below and from above, walking abreast across the road, then sitting along walls in the semi-darkness to gaze at rockets and catherine wheels as they spun colours across their faces. Arches of neon glittered in haloes over the hill, the church with its doors wide open and lit like a ship.

Children and black-shawled women shuffled into seas of incense; inside, in the misted shell of devotions, the muffle of intoning voices testified to habit and duty.

To-night there were as yet no boats in the bay; instead the fishermen, uncomfortable in formal clothes, strolled past stalls of devils and crucifixes, religious postcards and silk underwear. In their oasis of light the dark-suited, militant band played operatic arias with vocational seriousness. There was no dancing or drinking. The spectacle itself was enough—gunpowder and gaiety, incense and Madonnas, paper flags and rockets. What was important was the convention—homage in a local and favoured orbit to a particular patron. For the basis of the *festa* is the proprietary manner of the celebration. It is not just anybody's festival, but the personal thanksgiving of one particular community. While under handmade neon-arches the smell of sweets mingled with wine and garlic, and the noise of the stall-attendants made the band grow rounder and rounder puffing into trumpets to compete, the rest of the island slept unconcernedly in the anti-climax of an ordinary day. It was not their affair.

At midnight the crowd started to disperse. Children lay bundled on the laps of women or staggered with rubbed eyes round gaudy stalls. The fireworks began to run out. Only the church, all its lights burning, sailed like a galleon into the dawn.

Cold enough that night for a blanket, the wind brought with it the first real undertones of autumn.

The cloud and wind lasted for three days, according to local custom their normal duration. Then, in a rinsed blue sky, the sun gradually reasserted itself. Sea, hills and trees grew into sharper outline, as if some tonic was working in the veins of the landscape. The bright-painted boats hardened as sun glistened

on wet woodwork, and bathers' heads emerged from the plate-smooth sea like olives.

We rowed one morning across the bay to Lacco, walking up, past the piazza of sugary pink buildings, the church of Santa Restituta, to Monte Vico. The whole of the headland, the original Greek settlement and capital, is a tight curl of vines reaching to the cliff's edge. On the rim of rock a cemetery shut in by trees surrounds a derelict chapel, a vault for the dead of several wars. Under the jagged crust of crumbling walls turquoise inlets, with black bars of shadow obliterating the blue in patches, act as shelters for fishing-boats. This morning a few red floats, marking the netted areas, studded the otherwise empty sea like mines.

Looking inland from the protruding edge of Monte Vico, the island takes shape on either side like a relief map. The coast acquires an outline, the towns a relative size; one sees them as part of the same geographical formation, not split up into separate and uncommunicating sections. For if one loses the general view, the towns assume the character of watertight compartments, communities in which life is confined and not fluid, fostering their own provincialism.

Little now remains of the old capital and settlement. Recent excavations, mostly by Germans, produced some scattered relics, odd fragments of stone now in the Museum at Porto d'Ischia; but lack of proper funds has made any serious archaeological survey so far impossible. The information and relics in existence are due almost entirely to German settlers, like the Büchners who now administrate the Museum, whose enthusiasm, despite Italian disinterest, has created a basis for future work.

On the top of the hill, below which, on the other side, there is the wide, brilliant beach of San Montana, a naval signal-training station now stands, surrounded by barbed wire and flanked by two crumbling buildings. The larger of these is

occupied by the family which owns the vines and from their outhouses hidden in the undergrowth chickens scamper like anxious shoppers across the narrow paths. The vines cluster in crimped waves over the skull-shaped headland and walking between them you see only a closely-woven mass of packed green foliage, clusters of small, very sour grapes attached like pendants to the fragile branches. Looking down, the similar, savager cliffs of Punta Cornacchia stretch in mascara shadow round the other side of San Montana, like a last bleak frontier to pleasure. Beyond them, the jagged coastline turns sharply westward, with further to seaward the north-western Ponza islands—grey, prison shapes over which the shadowy ghosts of the exiled princesses, Julia and Octavia, still seem to linger.

Below, the few people on the beach moved with the exact clarity of insects under a microscope. The transparency of the deep green water made bathers seem to be embedded in glass, or stuck fast in honey-coloured sand. The bay looked stagnant, framed, with clouds overhead like peeling stucco, the water listless, held in the headland's vice. The distortions of voices came sharply up as beneath us bodies turned over on the sand, a ripple and unfolding of limbs as towels were shaken like the cloaks of matadors, and the copper movements never quite synchronized with the voices' echo. We watched while a troupe of extremely fat women waddled from a tent down to the water's edge, a litter of children trailing in their wake. Five women, four of them pregnant, a dozen children, yet the whole of a kind of culture—rich, unfastidious, emotionally as well as physically running to fat—seemed laid at our feet. The south always lacks soul because its history is one of emotional indulgence. The curbing conventions that give order, balance, a tension to character, itself vitiated by an amoral climate, have sagged through disuse. The legacy of the most gracious and cruel era of Roman civilization has been only to give a divine bearing for a season to its women.

For a brief, tremulous phase on the edge of adolescence, when the unformed, awkward limbs are suddenly, without one realizing it, complete, these Neapolitans, like vases preserved miraculously through time, personify the classic culture of their past at the moment of its overflow into the Mediterranean. But Time, the climate, betray their skins' muscled fluency, drying out on them too early. Breeding deserts the human figure somewhere between Rome and Naples—and watching these dark, vegetable women ensconced in the healing sea, their children stuck to them like toffees, one saw, as it were, in the imagery of flesh, the natural order of their life. Their emotions, like their bodies, exist publicly. Tears, anger, amusement, are logical consequences of feelings free from contrivance or ambiguity. Their great maternal quality, no matter how sensual, is incapable of perverseness—that is perverseness in the sense of subterfuge. For only in that irresistible moment in adolescence, when sexual mystery like a dew still lies on them, do these Neapolitans convey a depth and complexity that their whole tradition, their nerveless background, later make impossible.

We rowed back from Lacco Ameno over crinkly crepe water, the sun straight above us, dazzling off white roofs. From the sea everything is clean and unspoiled—the single row of shops, full of the plaited baskets that are a special local product, a skyline of pitted green, isolated villas like ice-cubes, the pink, confectionery pillars of thermal baths. The sun takes off the finer gradations of decay; it compensates for a lack of success. So, in the full flood of a Mediterranean day, ambition becomes a legend to play with, a toy of the imagination we fondle as we acclimatize ourselves to wanting nothing.

There is no bank in Casamicciola. Planning to move on to-day by the first steamer to Forio, I got up early to walk by the coastal road into Porto d'Ischia. A few lizards slithered

from the early heat into crevices in walls, like vagrant hotel guests returning in the morning to their own bedrooms. Coming down the hill to the perfumed harbour of Porto d'Ischia, the whole town in its miniature scale seemed to me perfect. A dozen or so fishing boats, coalers and launches lay beside glistening yachts on the waterfront. Everything was clean, fresh; the air salty and feverless. I changed some money, had a black coffee in the piazza, bought some illustrated weeklies full of Popes and film-stars, and caught the newly-washed 'bus back to Casamicciola, leaving just as the day's first boat from Naples came nosing into the harbour behind me.

At eleven the *Pythecusa*, a small sleek-white liner, sidled over a long swell, the gale's residue, and backed up to Casamicciola quay.

By the time we sailed the boat was nearly empty, the weather, there was still a slight wind, persuading most of the passengers to continue their journey by road. A few peasants clasped unhappy hands to ample stomachs, clutching at baskets of rolling vegetables as the boat lurched and swung, propellers revving in space, while the sea backed, sucked under to syphon itself out with a hiss on the rocks. A priest, with triple, pale jowls like ruffs, leaned over the side, his breviary held away like a cup of tea, as he mesmerized his future, praying for dignity with the sea's spume dripping like shaving soap from his apprehensive features.

Turning the north-east corner, the green coastline grows heavily dented, as if scarred by sudden slashes of wind. It becomes wilder and more romantic, with old, disused buildings, abandoned look-outs sunk into the rock at the edge of promontories. We saw a few white birds, like small puffins, waddle over stray patches of grass on cliff-tops. Birds are a rare sight—like Ischiot fish, they are all killed at the earliest moment, irrespective of law or convention.

Round the Punta di Caruso the warm honeycomb beaches

begin again, thin strips of sand under white breakwaters, vined hills stretching behind them to erratic skylines. Turning into the bay, the elaborate villas of Montevergine sheltering on the near slopes, the domes and turrets of Forio glow, yellow and pink, over a mile-long beach—an old Saracen out-post now given over to the gentler decay of peace.

FORIO

Forio is the second town of Ischia, the industrial capital though the furthest from Naples. Lacking a good hotel, it is also the least visited. Yet it is the one really indigenous town in the island, where the inhabitants seem to live for themselves, rather than for other people. The Forians have a life of their own, a working life that is related to the general history and commerce of Italy.

For, on the whole, people come to Forio to live. That is something one doesn't feel about any other Ischian town. The main street, with two facing cafés, its trees and neat, unpretentious houses, seems to reflect the needs of a resident community, not specifically catering for visitors. Because of this, perhaps, it possesses a familiarity, an intimacy of feeling, most nearly akin to a local culture.

The general atmosphere of Forio is half Spanish, half Arab. Twice in its history the town has been occupied by Spaniards and Moors, with whom, on one occasion, the Forian girls were forced to intermarry after their own men had been expelled. The children's faces, the architecture, the atmosphere generated by the tempo of Forian life, still show the effects of this Spanish subjugation. Many of the people are pure Arab types and the town has an oriental native quarter of its own. There, what was once imposed on local characteristics, has now taken their place, with the result that the narrow, cobbled lanes, the mud-walled alleys, shadowed under round, crumbling turrets, are more North African than either Spanish or Italian in implication.



View from Monte Epomeo, facing Vivara and Procida



A woman of Procida

Any inventory of Forian buildings and amenities would reveal comparatively less than any of the other towns. There are no hotels, only two very small *pensioni*; a small, rather shabby beach, few cafés, one restaurant. The town has an air of shapelessness, its streets stained and haphazard, so that there is no sense of a beginning, middle or end. It seems simply to have spread out each way as far as possible—down to the beach on the west side, with the beautiful sixteenth century fisherman's church, the Chiesa del Soccorso, on a precarious edge of rock overlooking the jetty, then as far up the hill behind as it could be conveniently taken. Off the piazza, small subsidiary villages fit into one another like straw boxes, houses with huge wooden doors, their courtyards surrounded by high walls. Sunless lanes slope into one another, for the whole town is on a series of different levels. Then, untidily grouped, large villas dwindle away into narrow rows of mud-houses and waste-land. On different seaward edges there are two cafés—*Nettuno*, with its flat stone roof, its brilliant four-piece Neapolitan band which plays slick, sophisticated jazz, and, opposite it, across a small bay like a social dividing line, a rougher, trellised *Bar Dancing* with a small floor, a raucous horn gramophone and excellent *pizze*.

That, superficially, is the limit of Forio—but its real quality lies in something different, something a catalogue of buildings, a statement of its architectural rhythm of domes and turrets, its moment of dazzle and mirage seen from the sea, does not convey. It is something to be grown into gradually, a quality of living.

Our *pensione* overhangs the beach. Hot, sultry, there is still a reserve of wind which tears the sky into sudden streamers, blurring the picture-postcard sea. The Forian waterfront, the curve and impact of the bay, are bleaker, less generous than those on the east coast. More exposed, the town is walled in like a garrison with secluded courtyards shut off under heavy

grey walls from the sea. On the beach, you look up at thick, stone buildings, their bases scummed with green, while, higher up, watch-towers, now disused and crumbling, squint lopsidedly out of tight, congested battlements. Built into the sea-wall, huge doors shut off cool, moist wine-caves.

From our bedroom, a cool, stone-floored room with mosaics and Moroccan paintings round peeling, stuccoed walls, we look across the bay to Montevergine. Below us, in the morning, the noise from the beach comes up like a wall. The sky is an eggshell slowly cracked by the sounds of day. The atmosphere of the hotel bedroom, something compounded out of nostalgia and bad taste—the ruthless tin jug and basin, blistered green shutters, the gilt dressing table smeared with lipstick and pigments, framed reproductions and Madonnas, a scarf draped over a bedpost, sandals and sun-tan oil—infects every day, something to which one grows used, and which acts as a drop-scene, permanent and reassuring.

Living acquires a different form here, a shape that Forio itself regulates. I find my whole sense of Ischia altered as if by an added faculty, because we have sailed round a headland. Here there is a compression of buildings, a contained manner of living, a purposeful distribution of energy. Forio, as does no other Ischian village, makes one aware of the past, a past strongly related to its present. Everywhere else, the requisites of pleasure are spread out like toys; there is no historical hang-over to impose a dialectic on the patterns of enjoyment. Work and pleasure are part of the same process of living. But Forio has very little feeling of a resort. It is a private place, its character something that can be acquired only with patience, only after one is resolved in oneself.

Superficially, we spend our time here in much the same way. In the early mornings I read or write in the exotic alcove off our bedroom, which faces the sea like a cockpit. The air is clean, like a tonic, the beach beneath us still empty. Occasionally

a boat splashes by to where, by the quay, rows of them lie up on the sand. Footsteps dissolve into shingle, a recession of tides making its impress on the morning. A yacht like an inflated petal curls into the bay. At noon the mail-boat slides over the silken water to drop anchor about two hundred yards out. A queue of boatmen jostle off her gangway for mail and for passengers. From the beach we watch the ships' officers, brilliantly white against the decks, supervise the unloading; *Santa Lucia* drifts lazily into the heat through the ship's loud-speakers. Then, after a moment's acknowledgment of the ship's arrival, a re-settling on the sand, the noise of ping-pong and iced drinks, the crawl and splash of swimmers, the rustle of papers, slowly orchestrates itself into social conformity.

The long jetty bisecting the bay cannot take steamers, so they have to lie some way out. Porto d'Ischia has the only harbour in the island where boats can come alongside, though at Casamicciola they can get near enough to the quay for gangways to be put across. Every day at Forio the mailboat lies off shore till four o'clock, then begins the return journey to Naples via Casamicciola, Porto d'Ischia, and Procida.

We lunch at two—the food unpunctual and inelegantly served but plentiful. We eat in a small, whitewashed room, on one side Baron and Baroness A. from Florence, on the other, the band from the Nettuno. F., an Italian ex-army officer, sits opposite. He struts into meals, his fair wiry body like a clothes-hanger in his khaki uniform. His stiff, toothbrush moustache twitches impatiently, waiting for food, irritated by flies. He smiles at us, then switches off his smile like an electric light. Openly Fascist, he calls himself a 'positivist' in our periodic talks. Man, he says, must be master of his own fate. From this it follows that the social system must allow him infinite expansion, both for good or evil. The development of the individual and democracy are incompatibles.

'I would kill myself,' he repeats, banging the table, 'rather

than live in a Communist Italy.' I believe him. The vision of Mussolini and Clara Pettacci, swollen and strung-up by their compatriots, does not mean to him the end of an idea. Pale, blue eyes stare inhumanly above his niggling lips, with the fanatical frustration of a superseded class. But F. is not an isolated phenomenon, only one of many, in whom already the particular amorality of the Italian character has reasserted itself. A complacent amnesia has settled over the years of guilt. A lack of the real heroic instinct, allied to a romantic moral duplicity, makes it almost impossible for their pride to be humbled. Curiously insensitive as a nation, despite their charm and sensitivity as individuals, they justify, without a blush, morally indefensible actions as historic necessity. They do it moreover with a greater sophistication than any other country.

Last night there was a dance to celebrate the opening of a new café. We went after dinner with Eduardo Bargheer, a refugee painter from Nazi Germany, now an Italian citizen. Bargheer is primarily a water-colourist, whose romantically-felt paintings of Ischian life have a formal classic line. Ischia has been little painted except by amateurs, and those few professional painters who have sketched the island have all missed the particular *flowing* quality of life that Bargheer has captured—the virile, fluent movement of people, the quiet but controlled dynamism in the rhythm of fishermen spreading nets against the sea's contained tension, the fusion of man and landscape in a *fauvist* identity within which each retains highly individual characteristics. The variety of colour, the flat whiteness of buildings that set off new subtle tones in familiar objects, are counterpointed by an architecture, oriental in spirit, round which the undulation of landscape prevents the heat from making everything seem static. Bargheer's drawings move in the same round terms as Henry Moore's, though the attitude to life animating them is totally different. Bargheer's figures do

not suffer or endure life; they are constantly forming a pattern, a harmony with what is going on round them. The blue and green backgrounds that seem to spill indeterminately into one another, are expressed more substantially, with more conflict, than Ischia on the surface appears to require. Yet the complacent serenity, pleasure as a determining principle of life, can, as we saw ourselves, suddenly change into a brooding sullenness that is temperamentally as true. Bargheer conveys both these indigenous qualities. A tension is present even in his most lyrical pictures of *feste*, his night landscapes and seascapes. But what counteracts it is the humanity underlying his conceptions. For in Bargheer's *Weltanschauung* Man and Nature are closely allied; they undergo the same trials, make the same romantic gestures before the inevitable cycle of seasons and events.

We reached the café at ten o'clock, when it was already crowded. Beyond the rocks the chromium sea glittered. Overhead the sky seemed a hazed reservoir from which the stars cut out their points of light. Two naked bulbs, fixed into vine pergolas, lit up a square cement floor round which about forty couples were tango-ing. In a ring outside the dancers, like spectators at a boxing match, a thick cordon of shirtsleeved men, brown faces shining, their blue-black hair glistening, sat on trestle tables in semi-darkness. Beyond the dance floor *pizze* were being served in an alcove. The noise was immense. Music was hoarsely relayed on records through the huge horn loud-speaker. It was hardly possible to hear anyone speak. We bought bottles of white wine, uncomfortably settling on a jogging table. Round us everything seemed inflated, overblown—lips, eyes, bodies, souls—a cluster of people that might drop off the rock like fruit. They took their dancing very seriously. Hardly anyone spoke, though in the thunder of the music speech was barely possible. The people were those one would expect to find at a village dance almost anywhere—a Navarro-type fisherboy dancing with a muddy-faced, visibly excited blonde;

the fat, sweating owner, his grin a slightly askew piece of whalemeat; two girls fingering crucifixes over pushing, print nipples, and giggling; a stolid wine-merchant and his wife sitting side by side, as if propelled on an inflated cushion to a respectable corner of heaven.

People began to get over-excited. Every so often slightly drunk figures pushed their way through the remorselessly jigging dancers. A few epithets of political abuse were hurled into the teeth of the music and swallowed up. Through the terrace moonlight filtered in a rippling stain across the sea. The café seemed like a brilliantly illumined raft—cut off from its moorings and adrift on a sea of warm alcohol. In this atmosphere the world of the imagination, the sentimental world, seemed the real one, whose problems were all relative.

The joy, the illusion that islands give us, is that time for ourselves, time in our sense, has stopped. They suspend morality, taking us away from the centre, giving a respite from obligation. We escape from our personalities, are given a double life that will not affect, nor be contingent to, our real one. Running up downward escalators at home, we notice the bright, ill-drawn advertisements, the promise to escape, to perfumed or gastronomic happiness. But repeatedly we seem to return to the same step, the same advertisement. Only a superhuman effort will get us off. We jump up a step, glimpse something fascinating, a new woman, a new island, then find ourselves lower down than before. The effort has to be greater each time; we have to keep moving or else we shall reach the bottom. Once we stop to consider, nothing will seem worth doing. That is the spectre at the bottom of the glass we dread to reach. To keep our hold on existence, we store up beliefs, schemes, intrigues, stories, in fear of waking up one day, our romantic impulse dead, sensuality dulled, alone with our nihilism. The world to which we belong is generically progressive. Once we abdicate from it, desire itself becomes

more and more repetitive, more and more expensive to satisfy. We enjoy pleasure only in the degree to which it is a respite.

Across the bay, the lights of the *Nettuno* were visible, clusters of orange on a flat, empty roof. The band played beautifully to no one. Forian night-life is sufficiently limited for there to be a *boîte du jour*. The real elixir of life was the gas of corporate-ness, so that one café or bar, usually a different one each night, was always overflowing while the others were empty. All these variously-shaped, variously-aged couples, buffeting one another like balloons or cars at a fun-fair, exhibited community security at its most invulnerable. The huge women, sitting drinking coloured *sirops* in rows at trestle tables, had the ruthless imperviousness of vegetable growths. All day these people opened like flowers to sun, food, sex, God, with the self-sufficiency of those who feel no responsibility for human affairs. Sensuous but not sensual, good-natured as well as sympathetic, their community-sense protected them like blubber from the keener anxieties of the individual. It encouraged their moral weakness, their natural ebullieny, because in each other they found reflected their own vulnerability. In a sense this kind of corporateness is German rather than specifically Italian, yet it applies accurately enough to Italian community life in a way that is philosophically unexpected. For Italian individuality does not owe its origin to ethical convictions, nor to a reluctance to conform. It is an essentially aesthetic quality of mind, whose moral consequences are not reflected in the sphere of action. The tradition of Cavour petered out into isolated gestures, like, for instance, Lauro de Bosis'.¹ The weakness of Italian art, of Italian thinking, remains its introspection, its view of itself as being always the victim of

¹ The Italian poet who learned to fly so that he could distribute anti-Fascist leaflets over the streets of Rome. He was killed in 1931 over the sea by Fascist planes immediately after his action.

an exterior fate. Climate, historical decay, a temperament conditioned by great vanity, all create compensations under which moral conscience is safely buried. A personal liberty of action, that has as its complement a prim code of behaviour, is an archetype of the sectarianism which, as in the case of the Church, is sadly powerless and vacillating in the wider crises of human action.

At midnight we returned through moonlit squares, past fawn, decorated walls, and buildings glistening in knife-edge planes of shade and light. Outside earshot of the café, silence hung like a conspiracy. We walked through empty streets, only our footsteps exaggeratedly echoing over cobbles. The air was hot and perfumed, the town like an Arab settlement cut off by mountains. We might have been under siege. But, later, through the open window the sound of sea, feathering over the beach, seemed like a rehearsal of release.

The heat makes walking impossible except after sunset. Then for about two hours, the sky melting from wounded red to lava grey, the sea-breeze elbowing eddies of space into humid air, the day's stagnation, like a collar, begins to loosen. A current of movement is established that gradually flows into a mosaic, a new over-all pattern. People lying on the beach stand up, unflexing muscles like dancers whispered into action by inaudible music; green shutters in the *piazza* rustily open; bead curtains rustle at the entrance to shops; beds creak as people lever themselves up from spongy comas. The afternoon's migraine is fanned gently away by a breeze that hardly ruffles the sea.

Except for the main island road, there are few good walks near Forio. The central hills begin too sharply, cutting off the coastal villages, so that once one leaves the town there are only narrow, very steep mountain paths. From Forio, apart from the shore road to Montevergine, there is only a rough track

through the vine terraces to Epomeo. In the afternoon the closely-cultivated slopes sag in the sun, bunches of grapes hanging down in tight clusters like udders. Climbing up, you can only see a patch of blue sky beyond row after row of vines; everything is dusty, but tenaciously struggling into ripeness. The earth ferments underfoot, its scrubbed, ragged surface deceptively fertile. Stones glitter like quartz where the sun catches them; lizards spin out of the undergrowth. Climbing higher up, the hills spread down into layers of vegetation, rows of houses, streets, sugary lines of cinnamon, cobalt, yellow, that eventually brush into soda-white where the sea breaks out of its burning net.

The sea-road to Montevergine joins the north-western point of Ischia to Forio. Parallel to a long silver stretch of beach, the road runs over a breakwater, with, to seaward, small white fishermen's houses, whose muddy compounds and miniature fruit gardens blindfolded donkeys irrigate with water-wheels. Before dinner a shuttle of people walk along the beach to Montevergine, a headland dotted with smart, English-owned but empty villas that drop, like a social scale, through labourers and fishermen's cottages, to half-occupied houses with broken walls and gaping roofs. Vineyards and pale-green canes grow to the edge of the sand. When the tide is at its lowest you can walk all the way to Forio by beach—otherwise there is only the flat, smoothly-surfaced road with its formal evening processions of people, its occasional tearing bus.

A Forian day. The sky is birdless, a copper blue into which we look from worn walls to a workaday beach. Heat is a rubber envelope round the crumbling edges of fortifications. The sea crinkles like a wafer. The noise from the beach becomes a crescendo, like a door being opened wider onto a party. The morning air is sweet and rinsed, the sand ribbed. We watch for the mail-boat like a time-signal—slaves of habit.

Our sun-fed sensuality is seasoned by bathers, early-Picasso figures forming human pyramids like acrobats. Muscles are unstretched, legs are mahogany wading into Chirico-green, healing sea. Everything is striped; deckchairs bulging with pleasure, parasols, awnings over the bar. The sky is blue enamel, chipped by children's voices, by ice clinking in vermouth and *aranciata*. We lunch on *pasta*, a burden carried all afternoon in the coffin of sleep. Our bodies, dark on white sheets, for a change seem pleasing. Awaking to a mackerel sky, the later sun fading, we watch cattle towed ashore from a boat, batches of three on a line, and wine barrels floated out on rafts in payment. Footprints darken on the crushed sand; a slight wind rubs the turning tide. Behind us, green hills fold into cloaks under sunset, their villas releasing afternoon sins. Getting up for some exercise before bathing I walk into the town past shops stacked with raffia baskets, crude Madonnas, sandals and postcards; past shops with bead curtains, spades and rubber balls; shoe-shops, wine-shops, past the suspected presence of a church. Unpiloted girls pass me, dark hair on their arms and legs, cool in the secret recesses of cotton frocks. Fresh from sleep, they look and smell like peaches.

Then at six the evening habit of bells, perfunctory genuflections multiplying as we pass by doors licensed with incense. Civilization, bad jokes, poster-art and *bonhomie* in the *piazza*. *Come unto me, my little ones, and I will comfort you*. We sit down amongst wicker-top tables, the light aqueous, the street quiet now the sun has been withdrawn. The café begins to fill up. Nearby, children sit with straws taller than themselves, serious as we will never again be, while coffee is brought out for cutomers cagey about alcohol. Pink, peach, pale-green dresses, rustle on freshly-powdered girls like fireflies waiting for darkness to set them alight. Sexual restlessness is abroad like a contraband culture. Amerpicons, Martinis, Cinzanos, ice like amber glaciers slips under prurient waters. The day droops

outwardly, but inwardly revives; the streets become arenas for dogs, following each other in a following wind, their barks a legend for centurions.

Reflections of waterfront houses glisten in framed windows, like court-cards, on the sea; the waves are a pack of puppies on a Spaniard's beach. Above them elegant diners wind up spaghetti and cram steak into wine-flushed mouths; check tables are left empty with sentinel bottles and grapeskins eaten into wintry trees. The day goes out in a sky like a crumbling circus, all spangles. The town flashes its domes and turrets in a murderous moonlight. Somewhere here history has left its residue in a kind of disenchantment, a regret nostalgic but not bitter. The Tyrrhenian sea picks up the stars, its longing distilled with an element of irony.

We have missed by a few days the triumphal return of a Forian cardinal. The Cardinal, the owner of a private palace outside the town, arrived in a cloud of pageantry, accompanied by Vatican escorts, for his summer recess. Now only inferior to the Pope, he was of very humble birth. When it seemed likely at one time that he might even become Pope, consternation prevailed in the town. 'Fancy! A Pope from Forio!' The people hold up their hands in horror, 'how could we have lived it down!'

To-night, under a clear moon, the town looks like a box of white bricks. The hills behind are dark smudges, a mere intensification of darkness. We look out from *Nettuno's* flat roof, sea syncopated behind us, in front small Arab-like streets of mud huts. The Neapolitan quintet expertly unsqueezes sentiment on the deserted roof-garden. In the bar rows of bottles glisten, sparkling demi-johns, like a chemist's window strained of its hygienic expression. But looking down over this almost African honeycomb of houses, the poorest section of the town,

with families sitting in the darkness, immobile, as a man chants, occasionally clapping their hands, we are held by a feeling that this is the more real of the two worlds. Dirt, apathy, decadence, poverty—yet their fascination is more than the mystery of unfamiliarity. Somewhere in this ritualized routine of existence, a curious paradox exists—a paradox in which disenchantment appears as innocence, vitiation as vitality. Primitive qualities merge into intensely sophisticated ones. Extreme ennui always, in a sense, captivates, because we imagine it the result of excessive intelligence. Sensual boredom, usually allied to narrowness of outlook, we take as the end-product of debauchery. We feel naïve before experience we imagine much greater than our own. In primitive conditions we memorize pleasure; only, later, like Rimbaud, do we see it as Death.

It is the constant European predicament; we look over from our uncomfortable littoral to a past whose origins we imagine as pure sensation. What is real is what we haven't got. A nostalgia of the soul begins to haunt us, so, in the end, we hanker after a barbaric happiness the present can never give. Most of all, we feel our lack of 'character', the anaemia of our age.

Another exchange of cattle and wine took place to-day. A boat came in during the afternoon; rowing boats went out to meet it, towing barrels through the sea behind them, while the boats' hatches were lowered and teams of cattle, like parachutists, pushed into the water. There were about twenty cows and oxen, pulled in on ropes, only their heads like mounted antlers visible above the sea.

Every evening, under green palms, the sky curdling above them, men sit playing *scopa*, intent as priests. Dark-throated, they wear short-sleeved white silk vests and faded blue linen trousers. Fishermen, café proprietors, labourers, clerks. An

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atmosphere of coarse tobacco, of stale sweat and pomade. Flies settle on white enamel lampshades, on bottles behind the bar; cicadas encroach with petty accusations. None of the men ever drink.

The bay unusually full of boats, the sea at its flattest. Striped deck-chairs on the beach, through which Neapolitan matrons sway like referees over a cross-talk of bodies. *August for the people and their favourite islands.* Table-tennis and girls, their breasts whiter where their *maillots* have clung, crucifixes absolving our eyes, and old men with straw hats asleep in the shadow of boats. Fresh and pungent, paint dazzles where always someone is painting his boat, someone with rolled trousers leading a donkey, his cart full of rubbish. *Limonata* and Nazionale cigarettes, newspapers uncurling in flurries of sand, remote headlines trampled under classical feet. A boat rounds the headland, sails breasting the air for a moment, then slowly subsiding; it circles gently some distance off, then, like a dog coming to heel, runs in on an even keel, shaking itself till, tethered, it rehearses obedience fluttering off the jetty. Over-ripe bits of fruit, cigar-ends, a litter of seaweed and *frutti di mare*; the beach smothers and drains us, while blue, patronizing skies, days without difference, burn incontinently ahead. *Passò quel tempo, Enea, Che Dido a te pensò . . .*

SANT' ANGELO

The most southerly point of the island. We came yesterday by dinghy from Forio, a two-hours' journey in boiling sun. The sea was molten-lava, a grey-blue treacle that seemed at any moment about to congeal. The coastline is extremely bare, only sometimes animated by pink, yellow and grey strata of rock. Isolated green tufts stick up round the cliff edges like hair *en brosse*. Then, behind the coast road, folds of outlying hills drape themselves at higher levels till the forked peaks of

Epomeo and Monte del Monte, like velvet muzzles, sky-write the island's original crater-rim.

We left Forio soon after midday, the only time we could get a boat. We hired one of the owner's friends—a sailor on leave from a luxury Italian liner—to sail the boat back before sunset, so it could go out again for the night's fishing. We took lunch with us—hard-boiled eggs, salami, bread, tomatoes, a bottle of Chianti and some peaches . . .

The south-west corner of Ischia is the least inhabited; its brusque outline is deeply indented, scattered rocks lying in shoals off the cliffs like underwater animals. Navigation near the coast for any but the smallest boats is as a result difficult. There are none of the indulgent softnesses of the north and east, no bays or strips of sand thrown like sables over the shoulders of the rocks. The cliffs slope back austere-ly or jut out threateningly, only scrub above them, a scurfy, arid top-soil without cultivation or houses on it. The whole south-west is divorced from the idea of leisure, the indolence and self-indulgence that animates the rest of the island. One's impression of confectionery pink architecture and operatic tenors, of dirt and over-ripe people, with in Porto d'Ischia a cosmopolitan and beguiling centre, was slightly revised, as the island seemed to revolve on a lathe in front of us. The south-west, open to the sea, buffeted and cracked by gales, is nearer in character to Corsica and Sardinia, a cratered volcanic remnant, than to the unambiguous pleasure-zones of the east coast of Capri and the Sorrentine peninsula.

Every new headland had marks of landslides on it, stubs of rock like decaying teeth, with lopsided débris at their base. Tell-tale patches of slithery, brown earth showed how, bit by bit, the island was being driven in on itself by the sea's erosion.

The water glittered like sequins, the early purity of blue sky thickened by a haze that took the pencil-edge off the horizon. We passed isolated rocks, miniature islands some hundreds of

yards out to sea—*Pietre del Cavallone*, *Pietra Bianca*, *Pietra Nera*—then round the Punta Imperatore, the most westerly point, we skirted *la Nave*, a rock shaped like a ship, with schools of lava fish playing in its wake. In the sticky-looking sea *la Nave* looked like an ancient barque, inexplicably arrested in full sail—stone bows half out of the water and, in the agonized second of foundering, the cries of the crew had been transferred immutably into rock. Even in the burning afternoon it redolated disaster, some human tragedy about which only rumours had ever trickled out. Yet this corner of the coast must have always looked like this—to early Greek settlers and successions of invaders, to anxious fishermen rounding the point for home. A grey, cracked loneliness, a foam-laced barrier, a birdless sanctuary, in winter; in summer a tarred, heat-swollen sea in whose clutches splinters of rock, the extremities of an island, were inextricably wedged.

Rounding the Punta della Cima, we had our first glimpse of Sant' Angelo—a cluster of white houses in meticulous dazzling tiers, a strip of sand engraved with boats forming a miniature isthmus, beyond which, in clumsy counterpoint, a mound of rock, still edged with the ruined walls of a *castello*, stuck up like a raw fist. Behind the village, the terraced slopes of Epomeo reaching to a bottle-green skyline, scrawled their rocky signature into the blue.

Sant' Angelo is purely a fishing village. At the foot of steep cliffs, it is off the main road, unreachable by bus or *carrozza*, and in winter is almost isolated. Its appearance is compact, homogeneous to the point of seeming self-sufficient; a community whose families are so integrated into a local pattern that it seems impossible at first for outsiders ever to break in. Confining their ambitions to what they see around them, to their fishing routine, the inhabitants appear immune from the vacillations of the outside world.

The quietest and smallest of the coastal villages, Sant' Angelo is the best to work in, since it is completely devoid of distractions. It has two small inns, two caf  s that are really wine-cellars used almost solely for playing cards, neither cinema nor place for dancing. Days here begin and end in themselves. The blue bay crushes into a shingle of boats, its great weight of hills insulated by the dripping white sands of Maronti. Off the beach, the hot springs of *fumarole* smoke like run-aground steamers; above them cliffs reach up to vines dusted with sun, tight bunches of grapes like curled and powdered perukes on the vine-sticks. Sant' Angelo offers its own quietness, its Mediterranean acceptance as a foil to our northern, neurotic protest against life. Each day promises nothing and everything; round the arbitrary times of meals we are free to devise our own culture. A compound of sea and sun, of reading and sun-bathing. Stranded in time we discard dreams like skins. To want something here is to have it and be rid of it for ever.

The sky feathers over at sunset, cotton-wool trails piling up to disperse at the brush of darkness. All day fishermen have played *scopa* in cool wine-shops; boys mended nets or painted boats in the blistering heat; women hung out washing, pale underwear wetly anticipating their comfortable flesh. Then, like novices coming to ordination, we reach the sanctuary of the first ap  ritif. We sit through twilight, burnished, satisfied, clean, sifting the day through its compass of pleasure. Then dinner, its camaraderie subsidized by neighbouring families, studies in character we observe through a succession of courses, *zuppa di pesce*, spaghetti, salads and fruit. An Italian lawyer, an enthusiastic amateur artist who dines in a white cap, sits on our right with his wife, a meringue-like blonde, an ailing pre-Raphaelite daughter, over whom he bubbles like a cauldron, shouting out jokes to other tables, growing swarthy with wine. Beyond them, the inevitable Swiss—an elderly, timid couple who come down to meals looking as though their souls had been



View from Vesuvius



laundered and starched. The wife over-read, earnest, Jaspers set like a passport to heaven in front of her; the husband ready to discourse on music and mountaineering at the drop of a hat. The third of our quartet, a retired Italian naval officer, so Roman in appearance he is a caricature, sits with his wife, a generous but outsize Isolde, on the verandah, the island riding the gentle sea like a ship beneath him. Through the tangle of language, the day expires; the room, blowsy with smoke, grows quiet. The sea is ironed out, relaxed. Above the village the hills unfold like the heavy, ribbed wings of bats.

Sant' Angelo is like Cornwall, with the English summer run riot. Cornwall on a brilliant day, mooning artistically in heat but uncluttered by inferior artists. Here life is art, an enjoyment that must be sucked in segments like an orange. It must be practised for exactly the right length of time. Too much drags you down, as too little starves you. To-day we have lain in the rock-pools at the bottom of the fumarole; pools so hot they have to be cooled with fresh sea. Above them, through a cleft in the rocks, a ravine winds into hills pitted with caves. Most of the caves are inhabited; at sunset the inhabitants troop down in families to bathe and wash clothes on the beach below. Some of the caves have small terraces, flattened out of the rock and overlooking the dried-up gorge. Mats, hammocks, sometimes chairs, are set out. At sunrise whole families venture out of the black cavity, rubbing their eyes like ferrets at the light.

Further up the ravine, whose rocks on either side, with stray cacti, make it seem like a Mexican canyon, special thermal baths have been sculpted out of the cliff. Each bath is a hollow dug out of rock and irrigated by boiling spring water. The rock is divided into compartments, each with its sunken bath fed by a narrow runnel, and each flanked by a flat, six-foot slab on which the bather rests in towels for an hour or two after bathing. Each time we went up, some child or woman

would be lying motionless and sheltered in a steaming cullender.

At about five in the evening, the inhabitants of Testaccio, a small rock-village, as well as the troglodytes, come down to sit in long lines across the sand. Only the boys actually seem to bathe, the women paddling in black dresses, occasionally squeezing out clothes in the surf. Though living so near the sea, a whole tradition divides them from the fishermen. Like natives at the mercy of suspicion, they regard the sea as an alien element—something that has to be accepted but not trusted. Their inland puritanism shows itself in a remorseless vigilance against exposure. On the rare occasions when the women or young girls of the interior do bathe, a whole second set of garments, fixed by a network of lacings, can be seen outlined under their black, shapeless cotton costumes. In morality, dress and social development there is a time-lag of nearly half a century between the people inland and those on the coast. On the coast every gesture reveals an amoral attitude towards life. Inland the villagers move in period costume, like faded, yellowing pictures from family albums.

Reading Browne's *Religio Medici*, the sun hot, the sky an aching blue, one is persuaded to accept his definitions of happiness. It is a pleasing variation of the principle of 'non-being'. We are rarely *consciously* happy because consciousness makes us continually aware of a thousand miseries and cruelties. But we can, largely by sensuous means, be induced into a traumatic condition in which the only reality is the immediate present. 'There is surely a nearer apprehension,' Browne writes, 'of any thing that delights us in our dreams, than in our waked senses. Without this I were unhappy; for my awaked judgment discontents me, ever whispering unto me that I am from my friend, but my friendly dreams in the night requite me, and make me think I am within his arms . . . And surely it is not a melancholy conceit to think we are all asleep in this

world, and that the conceits of this life are as mere dreams to those of the next, as the phantasms of the night to the conceit of the day. There is an equal delusion in both; and the one doth but seem to be the emblem or picture of the other. We are somewhat more than ourselves in our sleeps; and the slumber of the body seems to be but the waking of the soul. It is the ligation of sense, but the liberty of reason; and our waking conceptions do not match the fancies of our sleeps. At my nativity, my ascendant was the watery sign of Scorpio. I was born in the planetary hour of Saturn, and I think I have a piece of that leaden planet in me. I am no way facetious, nor disposed for the mirth and galliardise of company; yet in one dream I can compose a whole comedy, behold the action, apprehend the jests, and laugh myself awake at the conceits thereof. Were my memory as faithful as my reason is then fruitful, I would never study but in my dreams, and this time also would I choose for my devotions: but our grosser memories have then so little hold of our abstracted understandings, that they forget the story, and can only relate to our awaked souls a confused and broken tale of that which hath passed. Aristotle, who hath written a singular tract of sleep, hath not, methinks, thoroughly defined it; nor yet Galen, though he seem to have corrected it; for those *noctambulos* and night-walkers, though in their sleep, do yet enjoy the action of their senses. We must therefore say that there is something in us that is not in the jurisdiction of Morpheus; and that those abstracted and ecstatick souls do walk about in their own corpses, as spirits with the bodies they assume, wherein they seem to hear, see and feel, though indeed the organs are destitute of sense, and their natures of those faculties that should inform them. Thus it is observed, that men sometimes, upon the hour of their departure, do speak and reason above themselves. For them the soul begins to be freed from the ligaments of the body, begins to reason like herself, and to discourse in a strain above

mortality . . . we term sleep a death: and yet it is waking that kills us . . .’

The beach like a copper transfer of the mackerel sky. A motor-boat came over from Capri to-day, unloading two middle-aged couples, white-fleshed and plump, in time to launch them for short spells in the sea before lunch. Boatmen, unnaturally obsequious, set up umbrellas, striped and protective against the sun, unpacked hampers of ham, pie, fruit, olives and wine, and spread out garish towels on the sand. The two women, one blonded, with pink, peeling skin, the other dark and hairy, with a secret lubricated sexuality, squelched up the beach, breasts and thighs shaking, while behind them two bald, pigeon-legged, tight-faced men, prinked like undetermined Fakirs on scalding nails. They ate while we swam a little way out to sea, and when two hours later we returned from lunch, were all four laid out like bottles in a row. The two fair bodies, a male and female, were burning rapidly. In unison the four bodies rose and fell, rose and fell . . . flies lingered, buzzing round food and settling on thermoses sticking out of sand like the funnels of wrecks.

Our room is over a wine-cellar. All day, but especially after sunset, the sharp, raw tang of wine comes up in great draughts outside the window. The bedroom has only a black, gold-knobbed bedstead, a china bowl and jug on a wooden stand, a small rug on a stone floor, but from my bed I can see the bay glittering in flat blue lines through the shutters. The few villas on the opposite hill dazzle like salt, their whiteness too brilliant to look at. But nobody lives in them. We wake with the sound of barrels being moved below us.

After a twenty-four hour gale, the good weather is back. The sea like a green slide, transparent over a seaweed kingdom.

Growing restless we take the dinghy miles out, at last bored with sunbathing. To have reached that state is an accomplishment. We are happily back in the grip of our English vice, our need for self-expression. Driven by the ambition of the naturally lazy, our imaginative lives are full of activity. We have no climate to compensate for personal success. But now this initially exquisite Mediterranean inertia, an enervation we accept so readily, daily begins to lose its hold. The crisis develops between submission and escape. It is a crisis, however, which not only we face. For the Ischians themselves emigrate in great numbers. They return, but in the meantime they live the middle part of their lives away. To them Ischia is a place to return to, a sun-trap to retire in when the real business of living is over. It is not a question of unhappiness, but a simple human necessity. The necessity of change, of a comparative standard of values. So daily in ourselves we watch the human balance reassert itself.

Yesterday, after many postponements, we went up Epomeo. It is a steep, nearly three-hour journey either by mule or on foot. After a lot of hesitation, principally because it is very easy to lose the way, we decided to take mules and guides, letting them descend the same night while we returned ourselves at dawn. There was, we knew, a small hermitage, inhabited by a peasant-monk, who for a reasonable amount of lire, would provide us with a straw bed, besides, if we wanted it, bread and wine.

About five o'clock the drivers arrived, leading minute, but extensively upholstered mules. Both small dark men, unshaven and scowling, they stood silently about like brigands, flicking their whips, while we waited for sandwiches and fruit to be brought from the café. The first part of the journey, a steep hairpin track cut through the cliff face immediately above Sant' Angelo, is full of loose stones and winds along the edge of

precipices. Every few yards the mules slithered, the drivers bolstering them up by pressing their buttocks, pushing them at almost vertical gradients and breaking their slide when they slipped back. We climbed very quickly through bare scrub, on one side sheer drops over dried-out ravines, on the other the overhanging cliff-face. At each turn the flat, white roofs of Sant' Angelo grew smaller and more precise, a romantic village of bricks to which blue crinkled water seemed to come in on swivels. We could see where the water parted either side of the tightly-vined and ruined *castello*; beneath it a few boats lay tilted where shingle joined it to the village. From above, the arched blackness of doorways, the black holes of windows, some new unfinished villas, made Sant' Angelo seem for a moment like a shelled and deserted outpost. Then it came again into focus, its starched whiteness shimmering in the evening air. Figures were moving on the quay and a boat drew a paper wake slowly across the bay.

The whole gulf was now sharply delineated, a transitional moment of clarity before the bloodshot eyelid of sunset blurred it. The sun was already squeezed of heat and, for the first time during the day, a breeze bent back the reeds that swayed over space at the cliff's edge. By the time we reached Serrara, the first village beyond the main road, the sun was setting. Serrara is a small, well-planned hill village, mostly grey stone with an imposing gateway at its entrance and a relaxed atmosphere. We passed a row of houses, like English council houses, a boot-maker's shop, a wine-shop, a grocery. That seemed its commercial extent. Men sat on doorsteps smoking their pipes, while groups of people, mostly women and young boys, came steadily down from the hillside, bundles of reeds swaying on their heads. From now onwards, they would be laying in fuel for the winter, cutting down the overgrowth, the patches of startling, green cane.

The drivers became less reticent. My own mule was called

Togliatti, after the Italian Communist leader. His owner was about the only Communist we met south of Rome, but despite a reluctance to commit himself to serious political polemic, he doggedly reiterated his view that only a Communist government could help the landworkers. In fact, Mussolini, alone in Italian history, had improved agricultural conditions, though every modern Italian historian has emphasized the disastrous neglect of the peasant, the whole Southern electorate. Life in the south, always a struggle, a losing battle against bad soil, produces an endemic cynicism only intensive reform can alleviate.

We reached Fontana just as the sun slipped like a lozenge into the sea. Fontana is the highest point reached by the main road; from then on there is only a direct route up the mountain. It was steep, arid going, almost unrelieved by trees or vegetation. Occasionally we passed a peasant's disused, crumbling cottage, blurred like a sepulchre in the fading light; half-way up there were remains of a viaduct; then only the scurfy path parting the colourless scrub. It grew perceptibly colder, the air clean and sweet after the coast. Below us a few lights glimmered at various levels of the hill; at the bottom Sant' Angelo glowed, like a stationary railway carriage, the sea a pale wash in its lights.

We began the last stage of the climb in near darkness. The gaunt, ragged outline of Epomeo, its double peak suspended unreally over us, seemed to come near, then retreat into night. We had the impression of far greater height than actually existed—probably because we had made a direct climb from sea-level. Already the gulf was like a military table-map. The coastline round the arms of the bay seemed flat, a flicker of lights at the sea's edge, but blank where Vesuvius rose over the orange husk of Naples, a barrier to the Abruzzi. The guides pushed doggedly on ahead of us, their red woollen caps just visible as they turned to shout throatily at the mules who by

now had slowed down, exaggerating their tiredness. We began to be glad of our extra jerseys.

The last few hundred yards were through flatter, grey scrub, a mountain narrowing acutely into a forked peak. The path suddenly wound out of undergrowth onto an open, unfinished-looking stump of rock, with, at one end built into it, an oblong stone building.

We emerged into buffeting wind, from the quiet protectiveness of the mountain's barrier into noise and a kind of exposed finality. A huge door, just beneath the jagged crag of the summit, opened into a labyrinth of dark passages; immediately to its right, lights were burning in a small chapel whose door was open.

As we dismounted, a tonsured, slight figure wearing a brown habit came out of the chapel.

* * *

The drivers, after cheese, hunks of bread, and wine, returned almost immediately to Sant' Angelo, perhaps an hour's descent. We went into the cool, musty passages of the hermitage, shepherded by the peasant caretaker, a lay-brother who enjoyed the courtesy title of 'Father'. He had already lived on Epomeo for several years, accompanied by a small retinue, two or three boys, a bedraggled old woman, some goats and chickens. Living during the day as an ordinary peasant, he put on, at the approach of visitors, his long brown habit and rope girdle. Like the hypochondriac in Molière's 'Le Malade Imaginaire' who was unable even to hear unless suitably dressed—'*Donnez-moi ma robe pour mieux entendre*'—he liked to dress the rôle he was expected to play. So, the tenant of a hermitage, he dressed the part of a religious hermit.

The hermitage consists of two long rock passages, shaped in a T, in which about six cells have been hollowed out. Originally it was built by a monk from the mainland, who came to Ischia to find sanctuary from persecution; since then it had become a

traditional refuge for miscreant priests and for those sentenced to special penance. It is a long time since it has been used for any serious religious purpose and now it is only kept going by a solitary caretaker, who is allowed to use it as a home in exchange for simple religious offices.

Inside, it was dark, except for a spirit lamp held by the young boy who conducted us round. He took us first to the caretaker's own cell, a square-shaped room used as a bedroom and kitchen. A bunk lay in one corner; in another were several crates of wine. Under the small, round window something was frying on a charcoal fire. A candle burned from a table by the bed, its erratic light flickering over effete religious pictures taken from magazines and pasted on the wall, on a wax effigy of Christ, a sack of vegetables.

The old woman, her grey hair done up like a bird's nest, started to peel potatoes in a corner. Bottles of wine were pulled out of the crate, a loaf of bread and some cheese brought out of a cupboard. Then the caretaker led us out, down through the other passage, clanking his keys till we reached the end and he opened a huge wooden door.

Inside was a small cell, its low bed covered with straw, a plain wooden chair and table, a crucifix by a grated window. He lit a lamp for us, then told the boy to put down the bread and wine. From inside the crate we could hear curious scratches, a squeaking like a concertina being slowly depressed. 'You will be all right here,' he said, then 'Rabbits,' and smiled at last, a luxury, giving the crate a proprietary kick.

He was still a young man, perhaps thirty-five, his face a little tortured, but shrewd, his manner awkward and self-effacing. We stood for a while looking at one another, observing rather than trying to establish communication, feeling the lack of anything necessary to say. Then, after making a slight, abrupt bow, he withdrew.

Later, we went out onto the parapet at the end of the passage.

The building, entirely cut into the rock, sloped with it, so now, at its most extreme height, we emerged onto a small exposed ledge, like the bridge of a ship. We were at the very top, a sheer, impelling drop beneath, with, behind us, wider, gentler slopes reaching to Fontana and Sant' Angelo in the south. From here we could see the whole island; the five villages of Forio, Casamicciola, Lacco Ameno, Porto d'Ischia and Sant' Angelo like coloured paws; the inner necklace of *lampari*, their bow-lights trained on the water; the strip of illuminated coast from Baia to Sorrento. The gulf was magically alive—scintillating, mercurial, full of romantic readiness and hope. Watching its brilliant dazzle, its glitter of light, from so high up, was to transport oneself into old age—below was the unrealized past, the promise of beauty and happiness that was never quite realized, that had been allowed to go dead. Ourselves part of the mirage, we looked down at this trembling bay, this ancient relic of pleasure, flaunting itself, now like a dowager, now in the first flood of adolescence. Its wonder was its constant power of renewal; its ability to mean the same thing to successive generations, to be what everyone wanted of it. It is our own tragedy that we never seem to be at the centre. For us the centre is always a little way off, somewhere that recedes as we advance towards it. Happiness, success, the romantic relationship. The loss our age dealt in has been to make us victims of a universal conscience. An older generation's nostalgias hang on our backs like incubi; we suffer *déboires* without the pleasure of tasting . . .

Now, insecure, theatrical, the island seemed to swing on invisible moorings. The wind eddied savagely, a fierce whirlpool swirling and buffeting the rocks, which spilled below us in stony arrested agony. Only Ischia seemed to be fixed, the whole jewelled coastline flickering and winking, the lights of cars crawling to Posillipo, the continuous slither of lamps thickening, then fading away into intervals of darkness.

We awoke early to thick fog, the sky unhealthily pink like an inflamed eyelid. The mist was the colour of oysters, spiked by delicate antennae as straws of sun evaded the steaming air. Rocks five feet below were invisible, the island no more than an instinct. The hermitage was still quiet, soundless except for the clacking of poultry, the rustle of rabbits in their cage.

We finished the remainder of our grapes, rinsed our mouths with wine, then waited for the fog to clear. After an hour it was no better. The caretaker seemed uncertain what to expect. Once, he said, the mist had stayed for a whole week, when they had lost two chickens and a rabbit over the top. Waiting a little longer we decided to go down.

Gradually, at first seeing only a yard in front, we reached clearer air. The orange rim to the fog thickened, a beacon burning away at its centre, a rose sun over which trails of vapour clustered to disperse into lace flounces through which patches of hillside thrust like skulls. By Fontana we had dropped to a morning the origin of blueness, the gulf scalloped and fresh below, the Sorrentine cliffs still rouged with sunrise. Already patches of scrub and cane were dotted with people hacking away with billhooks, their long bundles swaying on their heads as their hips swung in counterpoint. Above us, Epomeo was still hidden; a cornet of fog fitted over it, stringing out like snow along the skyline. A few years ago, on a similar morning, an aeroplane had hit the summit, disintegrating without trace.

The descent took less than an hour. The first people we saw in the village were the mule drivers, rubbing down their mules, polishing and laying out the harness. I felt a proprietary interest in Togliatti who blinked soberly at me from under circuses of flies. He was hardly a handsome specimen, but, like Stevenson's Modestine, who accompanied him in the Cevennes, 'cheap and small and hardy, and of a stolid and peaceful temper . . . not much bigger than a dog, the colour of

a mouse, with a kindly eye and a determined under-jaw, yet neat and high-bred with a quakerish elegance'.

We had coffee and eggs in a café; there was an air of considerable excitement—a large octopus and *dentista* had been caught in the night and half the village had collected to witness the weighing. The fish writhed on the scales, its polished gills working under bloodshot eyes. Then suddenly its silver-green back shuddered, it half rose and slid broken to the floor. Bubbles rainbowed with blood noiselessly burst on the maroon stone. Beauty, cruelty, a kind of admiration, collaborated in their enjoyment. What could be eaten was outside the range of pity.

We went up to our room for bathing costumes, books and towels. The white sand of Maronti glittered through the open shutters. The sea was like sheet metal. We took the dinghy over, and swam far out into the bay.

Early promiscuity makes every successive relationship more difficult. We find it harder and harder to make the final act of acceptance. In our capability of infinite, separate desires, we are reluctant to confine ourselves to only one object. So we love with one eye on the bed and the other on the door. In each new relationship we have less to give, because, spendthrift with passion, we are now misers with what we have left. Life holds out so many different possibilities that what hurts most is the thought of giving up new experiences. It is the habitual need of novelty that makes us in general unfit for permanent relationships. For we live through expectation, not fulfilment.

But here, in these miniature islands, there is no practical alternative to emotional monogamy. A peasant marriage is so circumscribed that it is unbreakable. Relationships, though their horizon is limited, are doomed to endure. And watching these families in their immense, secure intimacy, their unsurprising daily routines, I am unable to envy or pity.

PORTO D'ISCHIA

Back; the island set like a butterfly in memory. We see it now as a whole, the towns in relation to one another, the proportion of coast to mountain, the character of their two communities. Its visual sharpness is not yet blurred by intimacy. We see it of course in only one mood, summer and early autumn, under which daily the whole gulf hardens from blue mist to emerald, then turquoise clarity. In the sun's ruthlessness it has been without subtlety, its tones savagely extreme: burning sea, the sky hard over Epomeo's volcanic tent, the dazzle of beaches under vined, scrubbed hills. The glare of white villas, picture-postcard harbours, the cracked, contorted coastline. A circle of road like a clip uniting the five villages, the pine-slash of La Mandra, the only dark colour in the landscape. It is difficult to know what the island is really like in winter. Opinions vary so much, though in any case few people live in Ischia the whole year round. The rhythm of life is too similar, the lack of natural conflict a kind of death. Ischia's character is chiefly analysable in terms of pleasure, in terms of the individual re-finding himself. It is a sanctuary, a playground; a backcloth against which people acquire dimensions; a landscape for figures. The sea rids one of anxiety, a saline under whose healing motion we rediscover a mental perspective. Ischia gives a standard by which one returns to live; it offers us, conditioned already to a way of life, a stimulating antithesis. And, because largely its nature is receptive rather than aggressive, we find in it ourselves more than a foreign island. Its history, architecture, its pattern of living, exist perceptibly but unoppressively; one is aware of them, as of a good host, but they are not striking, they never obtrude. So one lives in Ischia in the way that is most natural, most desirable to oneself.

Yet Ischia remains curiously off-centre, both historically and commercially. Its participation in the main events of the

history of Naples has been slight. It has escaped association with the legends of classical Greece; with Ulysses; with Atlantis. Like a poorer sister to Capri, it has been hidden from the limelight, the resort of the unfashionable, the discerning, the eccentric intelligentsia. Yet how much better are its natural facilities, how much more serene its beauty, its quality of life! It is remarkable how much the character of the Ischian towns vary, considering the size of the island. Each village has a particular, identifying quality; Casamicciola, a platform for the gulf, built like a chalet into the hillside, with Swiss hoteliers, Ibsen and raffia baskets; Forio, a Spanish outpost, intimate, adorned with conversation and churches, the home of Signora Mussolini; Sant' Angelo, simmering with springs, a flutter of white stone on a boiling hillside, its sea like a book; Porto d'Ischia, a private, Mediterranean metropolis; streets of bougainvillea and silk shirts; lifted faces, sun-glasses and girls; *gelati* and music at night. Ischia, for the visitor, has excellent, adequate or simple accommodation; three superb beaches; one of the best wines of the Mediterranean; an indulgent population; and freedom from the vulgarity of myth.

We came yesterday by motor-boat from Sant' Angelo. The south-east, like the south-west corner, is bleak and empty once the Marina Maronti and Testaccio are rounded. Huge split cliffs drop sheer to overhung, sucking waters. Tufts of scrub stick up on grey rocks like quiffs of receding hair; grottoes drip with saliva, the drop by drop torture of Time. Occasionally a solitary puffin dodders white-stomached on a rock, pompously appraising the sea; then there is only the slate confessional of cliff, till suddenly the headland is turned. We paid a line out behind the boat, hooking a large *malamite* off Capo Grosso. We played it for ten minutes, pulling it like a silver-green dart in the wake before bringing it in. Jerked over the side it fell exhausted in a crowd of feet at the bottom of the boat. Its eyes puffed out as its mouth worked like a nought and pinkish

ISCHIA

paste spewed over teeth like pocket chessmen. Beautiful to look at it had, as we discovered later, no more taste than any of the other fish we tried.

After an hour we came up to the fawn mound of the *castello*, beyond it the pink and blue cubes of Ischia Ponte, precise under a fringe of pines. The afternoon Naples boat passed us as we turned close inshore along the beaches, through the tiny entrance of the flask-shaped harbour.

To-night, to be near the harbour, we've taken a room at the Bel Tramonte, a pink-stained, waterfront building, over which sunset slants through a cluster of bare masts. We leave for Naples and Procida to-morrow. Across the harbour the bruised sky turns slowly green, the light dips like a muted reflector behind which the heat, as from an orange, has been gently squeezed. The water glows, a rich syrup in which boats are becalmed like fruit bottled in alcohol. August prepares to go out in the hushed tones of sunset. Behind us summer strings itself up on a darkening skyline . . .

Naples

A honeycomb of houses, peeling and stained, glows
For a moment in transfers of orange and blue, a sunset
Washed up on the villas that flutter like patches
Of flesh on Vesuvius—then, drawn near on a slow
Circumference of sea, the buildings blink and fret
Like analysed patients. Our eyes probe as the bay catches
Its breath, and we disentangle the miraculous from the death
Of the living, a cult of elegant restraint twined
Round these pillars. Below, the slums fester in refined
But elementary tortures, and ennui conjugates itself on rusted
bedsteads

Where the waterfront's eyes are black sockets inhabited
By lust, and dilapidation repeats what has already been said.
Yet wonderfully this antique beauty wanders like a woman
And what was drab, haphazard, becomes human.

It seems here a perpetual afternoon—the streets,
Deformed with beggars, burn a powdered white, the olive
Taxis tinny in their idle rows, while horses stamp their feet
Resigned as envoys under nursing flies; and always eyes
Of women under shapeless clothes say 'Give'—
The sea moons and glitters, molten with a mist
That puts the towns of all the islands out like sight,
And yachts, like paper boats, seem waiting to catch fire,
The bay imprisoned by two clenched volcanic fists.
In some great doldrum, the human cringes into the inhuman
Cauldron, this mauve-hilled bowl where men and women
Move in antique, classic forms, but yet are worn through
fluency
Of feeling—their defenceless beauty lacks the final pride

NAPLES

Of Truth, whose pedestal remains, but not its constancy.
Then sunset turns the anchored gulf upon its side.

And in the tenements, the people slowly stir,
Prepare for habitual conversation or put on pleasure.
Like a collar. Sorrento and the outer islands blur;
The sea becomes a gulf that insulates their treasure.
But, inland, the heat scarcely lessens; we cannot presume
Sleep until it comes. Instead, through lingering streets
• Our effigies, our other selves, wander, or dreaming, assume
Other lives, while sweat pours out on blistered café seats
We only pay for with abstemiousness. Nobody bothers now
About the public, artificial vices; all that happens,
Happens here in private. The decomposing houses, row on
row,
Put on their lights, and darkness falls, increasingly misshapen.

Procida

Procida is the only island in the Gulf of Naples to spread low over the sea; a slight, irregularly indented swelling, with buff cliffs and a castle that dominates a waterfront of stuccoed houses, backed with trees. Except for Baia, Procida alone has the appearance of being leisurely formed, the one part of the gulf to have escaped the volcanic *frisson* that leaves Ischia, Capri, the Sorrento-Amalfi peninsula, like suddenly arrested tremors. Though part of the same volcanic crater, it disturbs the sea only as some half-surfaced growth of the sea-bed.

The waterfront, seen from the sea, is a blur of pink, blue and yellow buildings; behind their oriental façade, the shallow hump of the island rises to subside into a parallel harbour on the far side. But on closer inspection the lovely rinsed clarity of the houses dissolves to peeling and stained walls, separated from greasy port water by a narrow cobblestoned road. In front of them half-painted fishing boats ride under the domed church of S. Giovanni.

Procida immediately establishes an atmosphere of self-sufficiency. The inhabitants neither make concessions to visitors, nor provide facilities for them. The small (10,000) decreasing population is prosperous in a way with which, in the whole south of Italy, only the peasants of Capri can compare. Shaped rather like a dog, $\frac{1}{2}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles wide and with a greatest length of $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles, the island is a mixture of yellow and grey trachytic tuffs, the remains of four nearly contiguous craters. There is no harbour, only a waterfront at Sancio Catholico, where the Naples boats reverse right up to the main street, and a small fishing harbour at Chiaiolella on the other side.

Joining the two small settlements on each coastline, a long,

PROCIDA

walled road, the Strada Vittorio Emanuele, runs the whole length of the island. Along the east a village spreads a few hundred yards up the hill—a teeming alleyway of fruit shops, fishmongers, tobacconists and churches. On the waterfront, three or four cafés, a general store and an open-air cinema look across at Naples—the town a smoky base under the sawn, volcanic skyline of Vesuvius.

Off the main road, which runs north-east to south-west, houses hidden from the street, with barred windows and beautiful, eighteenth century courtyards, reach down to the sea on either side. The whole of the road, which almost exactly bisects the island, retains an atmosphere of Spain. The high, set-back houses were all originally built by a long-since superseded nobility; their style and architecture as well as the plan of the gardens, are essentially Spanish—reclusive, distant, arrogant. They are now the property of well-to-do Procidan tradesmen, peasants in the evolutionary process of becoming merchants and landowners.

In fact, this feeling of bourgeois prosperity is the first dominant impression one gets of Procida. The people are busy, too concerned with their own lives to be curious about strangers or indeed pay much attention to them. So after the exaggerated, ruthless politeness of the other islands, of the Italian Riviera, the Procidans seem almost hostile. Infrequently visited, the island makes no attempt to attract visitors. It is to-day fundamentally a market-garden. Every inch of land is scrupulously cultivated and oranges, lemons, grapes and peaches grow in great profusion. As a result the island is almost self-supporting. The Procidans, after generations of being serfs on the estates of foreign residents, now own the whole island. Their stock is becoming increasingly bourgeois and prosperous—a race of fishermen, farmers and, perhaps their greatest local skill, shipbuilders.

There is one small hotel on the island—a white, stucco

building off the Strada Vittorio Emanuele. There the food is adequate, the four or five rooms clean and simple, with windows overlooking a lemon orchard. At the bottom of the garden there is a private bathing beach with the Castello di Procida on the left and Capri and the open sea on the right.

Procida seems to have participated even less than Ischia in the violent historical upheavals of Naples. Almost its only interesting character, John of Procida, spent hardly any time in the island. Norman Douglas describes him enthusiastically but somewhat vaguely in *Siren Land*, as the first man to conceive the possibility of a unified Italy. 'The tremors,' he wrote, 'of his splendid, sanctified hatred were felt from London to Constantinople.' Born early in the thirteenth century in Salerno, John was a distinguished doctor, rewarded for public services by being made Lord of Procida. In this capacity he accompanied King Manfred to Palermo in 1262. From then on his life was one long series of political intrigues. In 1266 he launched successive conspiracies against the Angevins, two years later following Corradino di Svevia to Rome, where he was forced to hide in the suburbs to avoid arrest. His properties were confiscated, but in 1270 he combined with Enrico di Isernia, in exile at Prague, to push the claims of Frederick of Thuringia to the throne of Sicily. When, shortly, the Svevi cause began to fail everywhere, he went into exile in Aragon at the court of Jacob. But still unsatisfied, he took up the territorial claims of his new benefactor, in Sicily, and, in fact, landed there as escort to Jacob's daughter-in-law, Constance, in 1283. He was made Chancellor of the Kingdom, but again intrigues made it impossible for him to remain and he left for Rome, where he died in 1298.

John of Procida is probably best known for his part in the 'Sicilian Vespers,' a rising against the French which began on 31st March, 1282, at the hour of vespers. A rebellion broke out on Easter Monday in the piazza by the church of S. Spirito

PROCIDA

in Palermo, caused, it was believed, by the action of a French soldier who, suspecting that the worshippers had hidden weapons in their dress, began searching the women. A massacre followed, and the few French who escaped were driven out of Sicily.

The castle of Procida, by far the most prominent part of the island, was for some years used as a political prison, especially under the Fascists. Now it is a corrective institution for ordinary criminals, its fawn battlements turned resolutely away from Naples. A crumbling appendage of alleyways and half-tenanted, roofless houses straggle down behind it to the modern village.

Now, the end of August, the island is almost empty. We share the hotel with a distinguished Roman art critic who comes here every year, a trumpeter from a Naples night-club, an engineer, and the widow of an Italian Air Force pilot. They each appear to have a tacit agreement not to recognize the other. Procida seems to encourage *turismo incognito*, a fact which one observes with relief. The bonds are cut. At meal-times, after intervals of bathing or sitting in secluded corners of the gardens, the guests arrive at their own tables and set up their books dutifully in front of them.

The bathing is excellent. The hotel has a private beach, a thin strip of sand under overhanging gardens. The bay is flat, the sea shallow for several hundred yards out. The whole of the south coast is extremely sheltered, shut in by headlands at each end. Looking at the island from the bay the skyline stands out of the water like a brush—a thicker, darker green than anywhere else in the gulf. On one corner, the bluff battlements of the castle hang like a legend over a very dirty but picturesque harbour. This disused port at the back of the old town is the one scar in the landscape. Otherwise the *paysage idéale* of *Graziella* has scarcely altered; it still exudes the

passionate pantheism of Lamartine's or de Musset's poetry, so that to-day one is aware of a morbid romanticism, the legacy of the *mal du siècle* hanging like a spell over the island.

Procida has never really grown out of the nineteenth century. Over the spun glass of the bay and the veridian spine of the headland melancholy waits like a disease, a solitude preserved with the care of an ancient face refusing to acknowledge reality. The landscape opens like a book of memoirs, the pages nostalgic with names—the skyline writes out Byron's death like a signature, the air is full of Chateaubriand's *Réné*, the love-letters of Mme de Stäel, the compulsive miseries of Constant. It is still the naturalistic world of the German romantics, of Novalis and Tieck and Eichendorff. The yearning of a century running on the rails to industrialism hangs innocently over the orange-groves and cypresses; the express has not yet arrived. The flood of feeling has still to reach the sea.

Capri is visible to the south, a mauve shape of varying intensity. Reading Rilke's letters to his wife from the Villa Discopoli (where he made the decision to abandon domestic life for ever) one re-experiences very vividly his feeling of release. Capri, to Rilke, was the first stage on a long journey to invulnerability. 'My present solitude,' he wrote, 'is affording me a sort of psychic plaster-bandage in which something is healing . . . There is nothing, perhaps, as jealous as my profession; and though mine could be no monk's life shut in and shut off in a cloister, I must try gradually to grow a cloister about myself and take up my stand in the world, with walls around me, but with God and the saints in me, with very wonderful images and implements in me, with courtyards and fountains whose source is no more to be found'.

Yet Capri itself, Rilke found, was a monstrosity. 'And now Capri. Ah, yes, I have nothing much to learn here.

Well, this place has been stamped by an enthusiasm thoroughly ill-used; the tourists are for the most part gone,' (he wrote in December), 'but the marks of their stupid admiration which always falls into the same holes are so blatant and cling so tenaciously that even the tremendous storms that occasionally take the island in their jaws cannot sweep them away. Always I grow really melancholy in such beauty-spots as these, faced with this obvious, praise-ridden, incontestable loveliness . . . Perhaps we may *begin* with this picture-book kind of beauty, learn to see and love, but I am rather too far advanced to acclaim A and O in front of it . . . No, what people here have made of a beautiful island is most appalling'.

In Procida there is little 'picture-book beauty'. Instead, there is something uncommunicative, almost secretive about the arrangement of landscape and houses. Their interrelation assumes a meaning on a deeper level than is immediately apparent, so that one imagines an intimate life going on that can never quite be tapped. The visitor is outside the circle within which everything is implied and emotionally significant. It is a sensation generated by no other place in the Gulf of Naples. The mainland, Ischia and Capri, convey the impression of a fundamentally open life, with a generous welcome for anyone who can pay their bills. In Procida the rugged corners have not been smoothed out; the inhabitants preside over their island like a pearl whose value they know but prefer to its money equivalent.

At midday the beach fills up, the surf-line squeezing itself out like toothpaste below families sitting stolidly under striped umbrellas. Procida has few visitors; attractive men or women are rare. Instead of the vaguely exciting restlessness of Capri and Porto d'Ischia, one enjoys a luxurious serenity.

Here one knows in advance there will be no sudden adventure, no *crise de coeur* that will make whatever one is doing seem

unreal. Detached from any form of allegiance, the senses can give themselves over wholly to their own refinement. The powder-blue sea irons out its aprons of surf; the palms and pines ricochet off the china sky; one gets back, very gradually, something of one's past.

Time acquires a new rhythm. Getting up early to bathe, we breakfast with fresh palates, the day a cellophane strip waiting to be torn. Read till 11. Bathe again till 2. Lunch in the shade till 4. The afternoon languishes for the *apéritif* hour. Dreams become notebooks of sensation, the noise of the sea an asthmatic sigh.

The beach at Santa Margherita, on the other side of the island, is only used by fishermen for mending nets. A ridge of scrub separates the sand from the fishing harbour of Chiaiolella, round which the small village of S. Giuseppe is spread. To the West, across a narrow stretch of water, the island of Vivara—a hump of closely cultivated rock about a quarter of a mile long—obscures most of Ischia, leaving only Epomeo and the buff quay of Casamicciola visible. To-day a heavy sea has been running on this side of the island. The beach here, the Ciracciello, unlike the over-hung bay off the Carbogno where we normally bathe, is completely exposed to the east winds which round the Abruzzi. Rough weather in the Mediterranean breaks up a pattern of elaborately established living like a relationship. In the North storms have a certain eloquence, a poetic intensity which produces an elation of its own. But down here, at the height of summer, they act as irritants, intrusions between the landscape and oneself.

To reach the castle you have to go through the oldest part of the town: a series of dishevelled buildings on either side of steep stone steps at the top of which, inside layers of crumbling walls, the castle lies across a moat. Round it dark, narrow

streets, badly in need of repair, elbow one another with half-derelict but occupied houses being edged gradually off the rock into the harbour below. This sector of the island is extremely dirty, a running sore much of which is cut off from the sun by overhanging rocks or fortifications, and which festers in perpetual semi-darkness. A small community, successors to the original camp-followers and other-ranks' families which lived near the castle when it was a garrison, still exists in a kind of private underworld of its own. Pallid, slovenly, thin, women emerged from their areas as we passed them, blinking like moles as they came into bright sunlight. Amongst tenements, two sixteenth century chapels, now disused, look over small, refuse-covered squares. Behind them the castle rises up like a huge head, dwarfing the straggling body of the island. A wide, flowered road leads up to a heavy iron gate. Inside, barracks form a quadrangle of grey stone, with neat flower-beds set amongst gravel borders.

The castle is now a prison. Walking up the hill we could see men outlined on the flat roofs and coming up to the gates smell the nauseating odour of cookhouses and galleys. Prisoners carried pails across the bare parade-ground; warders stood chatting to girls at the entrance, behind them the arid atmosphere of human isolation and confinement. It was mid-day and trolleys, with meals congealing on tin plates, were wheeled out of the galleys into the barred cells opposite. Gladstone's letters show the appalling conditions in nineteenth-century Italian prisons. Since then things have improved, though the whole penal system, as recent Italian films have shown, is still in need of wide and sweeping reforms. During the Fascist régime, Procida was largely used for political prisoners, and probably their treatment there was no better than in most places. But judging it now as an ordinary civil prison for severe offences, what we were allowed to see of it seemed sensible and clean. The Neapolitan islands, Ischia,

Procida, Ponza, Ventotene, San Stefano, have a formidable prison tradition and the castle at Ischia especially showed the kind of deprivations—sunless cells, areas parapeted from light—devised to increase the natural isolation. In Procida an informal kind of relationship seemed to exist between warder and prisoner, and indeed the greatest part of the punishment is simply loneliness.

From the castle, there is a view of the whole gulf—the mainland from Pozzuoli to Sorrento, Capri's double hump, mauve in the summer mist, the skyline above Naples broken by the goitre of Vesuvius. We walked down in the hot sun, through small off-shoots of the old citadel, past dilapidated squares, with alleyways flanked by roofless buildings, the silence only disturbed by poultry, panicking into disused stables. The cobbled streets, with flies circling over refuse, wind backwards and forwards, the sun's dazzle shuttling off whitewashed walls. We went down narrow turnings, pushed back now by cul-de-sacs, now sheer over sudden blue sea, with strips of the bay like coloured panels below.

In the late afternoon we walked the whole extent of the south-eastern coastline, a two-hour walk on a cliff path with the sea on one side and lemon-trees and vines on the other. The lemons from Procida are the best in Italy. The gardens reach down on the south to a wall overlooking the Carbogno, a white fringe of water spilling over a copper brow of sand. Further along, towards the wooded cliffs of the Punta Solchiario, the shadows lengthen early, so the whole eastern coast is a dark green, ribbed with oyster on the skyline. There is hardly a house on the promontory. A few steps hewed in the rock of a small cove lead to a bath built by Ferdinand II—a miniature enclosure, where he could enjoy sea-water and the sensation of bathing without the inconvenience or dangers of the open sea. Overlooking the harbour of Chiaiolella there

are one or two Bourbon houses, with the relics of larger buildings left haphazardly about the hillside round them.

We took a boat out from the harbour and rowed over to Vivara. With a strong evening breeze and the current against us, the mile up the Canale di Procida took nearly an hour's rowing. Vivara is private property, an unsubmerged crater shaped like a crescent, about half a mile long, with a height of between 200-350 feet above sea level.

There are no beaches or any landing-stages to the island to which the only approach is up steps built into the rock at the north-eastern extremity. The steps lead under a stone archway, up a steep path sheltered by oaks, winding over the back of the rock to where, at the end of beautifully laid-out gardens and surrounded by trees, two seventeenth century farmhouses stand adjacent to each other. A fringe of cypresses, like a monk's tonsure, runs round the edge of the island, through which the gulf is always seen through a seasonal gauze. Now the leaves were russet, the moon already out and where the sea, half an hour earlier, had been dipped with sunset, a chromium bar polarized the three islands.

Vivara has an atmosphere of intimacy, of personal possession, extremely rare in the modern Mediterranean. Its quality is curiously English, its smell and feeling that of an English manor, intensified and given a kind of rugged resolution by its isolation. We walked through formal avenues of olive trees, past terraces on which the vines were interspersed with fig-trees, and further on oaks spread gnarled branches over slender limes.

From the top we looked across at the pitted-velvet crags of Epomeo, the Castello d'Ischia forbidding and dark against the flickering waterfront lights of Ischia Ponte. Then westward down at the gentle sprawl of Procida, the castle hung on the far coast like an illuminated bird-cage. Between them Vivara was a link as well as a frontier—discreet, noiseless, only its

cultivated elegance and the motor-boat at the foot of the steps betrayed any occupants. Vivara is, in the best sense, private. In the past its privacy was more fiercely contested, once owned by a retired priest who defended the sanctity of his possessions by firing at any boat that seemed likely to approach.

We spent an hour walking the length and breadth of the island. Then, the tide and wind at our backs, took only fifteen minutes to reach Chiaiolella, rowing in the hard moonlight past the handful of *lampari*, their bow-lights like the head-lamps of surgeons probing the water, coming out into the bay beyond us.

To-morrow Capri, bathing from rocks, the funicular railway, the unreality of appeased desire. Then later the journey out of this dying heat, away from the drugs of pleasure, through termini, centres of earlier, nostalgic civilizations and now inescapably remembered as targets, up to autumn, sadder in the north and further advanced. We come home expecting to find change, but somehow never grow used to the first blank days of emptiness. Nothing has altered; our friends are away; another summer has escaped us.

Capri

Blue. That is the mnemonic, the inhabiting colour
Which stretches, as now, into greyness, a night
That never quite falls, but remains an infinite
Prolonging of the *apéritif* hour. So we watch
All these burnished people, residues of disaster, meet
In a miniature *piazza*—the disinherited and precious
Exceptions to Gallup—who casually greet
One another, like members of fluid but chaperoned
Communities, daily more part of the great
Nothingness, the moneyed Nirvana, indulgence induces—
The physical vacuum of too much sunburn, the blindness
Of eyes smoked in their glasses, as the body
Is turned like a lathe that reacts but never produces
The worlds' necessities. Only instead is exhibited,
Relentlessly, a nervous disquiet that nags like a toothache.

The mountains glitter in their shagreen coronet.
Fishing-boats sieve moonlight through their nets.

In daylight the green, shrugged hills dazzle
With villas, the rocks each favoured
By illumining girls like polyps, the slow sizzle
Of *oursins* advancing through tide-lines
Of unsoured blue. Everything dances and glitters,
Sea, stone and miraculous eyes, as hours are frittered
Away with the surf like a gargle in exhibitionist
Caves, the elements harmonized, impeccably behaved.
Bright paintwork blisters on commercial armadas
That skim round the grottoes, with hawkers hidden
Round headlands, peddling crucifixes, coral and anemone

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

Necklaces. Over this, the patter of Tiberius and Douglas,
Dior and those sibilant queens with voices like cicadas,
The sun guilelessly presides in its role of almoner.

Yet almost like a mother this petted island
Returns beauty with a kind of love.
Where one might say goodbye without regret,
But not unmindful of the generous blueness
That became itself an omen, like the jet
Eyes of disregarded peasants, of something near to happiness.
To be bought, certainly, the sudden and brilliant
Song of these warm and marauding throats;
But that one expects, here especially on this remnant
Of Europe where luxury has always been at a price
Not always worth while. Now we watch the white surplice
Of the cliffs flutter like a waved handkerchief,
The last boat to the mainland put the island away,
And feel the gulf lost like this every, one day.

Blue. Yes, the simplest of all mnemonics
Holds us, prisoners of the sea's technique,
Its salt and noiseless impress on these vineyards, olives . . .
Hurt most by allegiance to our other lives.

Seven Poems

CASAMICCIOLA

The sea-road lined with oleander, a flourish
Of surf at the foot of the breakwater, then only
The blueness unravelled on the beaches of Gaeta . . .
So from our white house, set like an eye
In the hillside, with trellising vineyards for hair,
An atmosphere of lemons that dries where
We reach out our fingers, we see the sky's
Slide-rule and filter measuring
The limits of this town—a precise arrangement
Where whatever moves, boys on the quay, fishing boats,
Women, moves within our compass,
A composed canvas on which only we alter.

Ribbed with the heat, the turreted buildings
Blister a siphon blue, a soft pink that melts off churches
Like mosques, then drop to a piazza
Of palms and taxis, with behind them, like wings,
The silhouettes of black, salt-crusted sails
Enclosed in the embrace of the jetty—
A whole town so inseparable from its flared and bright
Colour, that only the oyster evening
Gives it a character, a sense of breathing,
The sunset cuts into like a dripping stiletto.

Half-way up a vined and muzzled hillside,
The skyline a fever chart, below which
We watch butterflies and lizards flicker and glide
Like images on a palette, our own life
Grows into this pattern of discriminating living—

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

Sea, sun, a soft and reciprocal shape
We provide in each other, a face
On the pillow or the sand—as daily
We squeeze out from the bay like a grape
Our northern bitterness, our own appetite for pleasure.

ISCHIAN CARD PLAYERS

All day, under pergolas of vine, with lemon-trees
Straining the heat through their leaves,
They play for their miniature stakes, knees
Crooked under tables as the fabulous
Cards are laid down, and the sea heaves
Itself up on its sable beaches unnoticed—
From the cards, eight eyes hope for the miraculous
Suddenly to offer them something they've missed.

But nothing can happen. Undermined by leisure
They watch against the separating sea, olives
And fig-trees move and ripen while they play,
The whole summer given over to protracting pleasure.
Yet all the time they envy us our lives,
Who see the sunset grow into the windless bay,
The island glitter like a golden villa,
With no leisure of our own—except these stray
Moments, when outside our realer selves, we watch
Their endless playing, only night at the tiller.

A PRIVATE FILE

The oars run the emerald water off
Like noiseless words—beneath the boat
Small fishes flick their sudden tails, while
Sunset drapes the island with its coat.
We put To-day into a private file
Our senses keep—a paper island
Round which embossed skylines, roses,
Transfer themselves, as off the mainland
Of our lives the acid water seeps.

These pages that we write with looks,
The sun drawing through the vines
Your trellised eyes, the fluid hairline
Dark with shadowed olives,
In time will move us like those books
We read aloud inside our private bay—
Touched by other human griefs—the day
We scarcely dare return ourselves
For fear of how we, and the island, look.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF BEAUTY

Held in one's hand, this gulf with its islands
Spread out like toys for a permit to view,
Moves in a compass as we turn round the map,
Or ourselves—bearings that are never quite true.
Now, over the lava-holed rocks, romantic mishaps
Are condoned through reverence for a cruel antiquity;
And we extract from To-day our measure of pity.

These Bourbon harbours that evening exquisitely bleaches
In peach-coloured light, the Aragonese cellars where nuns
Layed down to die and their bones, loaded like trophies,
Are held up for approval by toffee-skinned boys, teach
What we already know—that only pure ethics atrophy.
The Past can always get by through its beauty;
Its legacy aesthetic, Goodness and Truth were never its duty.

STORM AT FORIO

Yesterday was quiet; the sea like blue milk
Lapped round the beach, a saucer that spilled
The sunset back in the sky; only the ruffled, silk-
Flowing canes at the sand's edge filled
Up the vacuum left by the cicada's quiet.
The silence worked on the nerves like a diet.

We had grown used to a particular aspect
Of living; we imagined as permanent the stare
Of the cloudless sky, the boats like derelicts
Asleep on a mirror of water, the barometers 'Fair'
A norm that could never be altered.
Then the storm broke suddenly; the set-piece faltered.

The island was not as we thought; growing stale
Or familiar, our love was shaken like a dog;
The calm sea shattered in pieces of china, the frail
Vines blew like memories. Now only the clog
Of these women's footsteps reminds us of permanence,
Our fixed Imago, to whom we offer each faithless allegiance.

SEVEN POEMS

SIROCCO

Some days the island, like an anchored boat,
Appears to rock upon its green-flecked keel,
Or like some chained cathedral move its throat
Of hills against the wind, a vine-sailed galleon
Touched with sun, that holds us in an antique wheel—
While round us the sea thuds like a stallion.

Then streets are on fire with whipping dust, us
Vines rustle like dresses that reveal,
On terraces behind them, the scrawny pumiceo crust
Of its soil. From the tired hill we watch spray
Cover cactus and olive with salt, the heel
Of the island, Sant'angelo, tied to its bay.

On those days we drag our boat in-shore,
Beyond the reach of the cerulean sea, and sit
In patches of sun, reading, Browne or More,
Who refused to give in to a fashion for wit,
But remaining secure on their waves of prose,
Wore Morality in their heart like a rose.

These wind-swept days need disciplined words,
Sonorous passages with clauses whose counterpoint
Of bells fill us with suitable awe, a music
Of grandeur that scorns the seconds and thirds.
The tones must be all *appassionata*; out of joint,
Our own times only offer us delicate relics.

For the time being we live in a vacuum;
Without boats, we imagine all our sources
Running out, ourselves left to our own resources.
God or *das Schicksal* has put down the boom;
And, in enforced leisure, we feel the harbour
Of our minds develop—the wind says 'Relax',
So obediently, to some lacuna of unknown calm, we labour.

VIVARA

This private island, fawn and twilight rock
Round which the sea crushes its powdered
Salt, seems, as it rusts into blood, to mock
Our dependence—wild, but ordered,
Its tassels of silver olive, laurel and oak,
Are terraces formal with possession, kept, yet
Preserved from infection by a channel of sea,—
Its free antiseptic—washed nightly through noiseless sunsets.

The whole area under a mile, two houses stick
On a hump of its rock like bricks, and, part
Garden part tower—an eye whom good luck
Severed from the mainland—its life is the art
Of completeness we seem to have outgrown.
The wind changes through the points of the compass,
But here, where each tree has a name of its own,
The sun is quartered on a miniature atlas.

For sailing boats a cathedral, whose precipices
Urgent with suicide spread out beneath them
A green and motionless sea, the evening's surplises
Alter this rock to a lighthouse lacy with foam.
Its stone walls witness three centuries of solitary
Living, from which, like these trees the bay
Pours itself through in its chromium tracteries, envy
Is distilled, life secure in its own way.

Part Two

HISTORY AND ASSOCIATIONS

History of Ischia and Procida

(There are certain intimacies in all ladies' lavatories we just lease to imagination)—FINNEGAN'S WAKE.

Ischian history goes back to the time when the whole of Italy was covered by water and what is now known as the Tyrrhenian Sea was a mountainous continent, of which to-day only the peaks of Corsica, Sardinia and Elba survive. During the late Mesozoic and the Eocene ages this continent gradually subsided, as the Appennines appeared from the waves. Later, in the Pleiocene age, much of Italy was reclaimed by the sea and the Gulf of Naples was formed.

Geologically, the bed of the Gulf of Naples and the subsoil of Campania Felice are the same. Through the breaks in the earth's crust, basaltic lava was forced to the surface, a principal constituent of its rich volcanic soil.

The island of Ischia itself is now thought to be the result of several eruptions of different types, and not of a single large volcano.

The first signs of human habitation in Ischia appear in the neolithic age, or rather at the time of transition between the stone age and the bronze age. There are only a few remains—tools, fragments of pottery, flint and obsidian—but they are sufficient to indicate that the island was fairly densely inhabited at that time (about 3000 B.C.).

Before this Ischia was still subject to volcanic eruptions and too hot for occupation. Capri, however, was not yet an island but part of the Sorrentine peninsula, already inhabited, as the flint instruments and weapons of the late Palaeolithic period

show. Herr Buchner, writing of Ischia in 1948,¹ picturesquely proposes that the eruption of the island from the sea must have been witnessed by the men of the mainland—those men who had as their companions the elephant, the hippopotamus and the prehistoric rhinoceros.²

The Ponzian islands were too small and too far from the continent to be inhabited by palaeolithic man, but in the succeeding age one of them, the island of Palmarola, became important as the centre of the export trade in obsidian. During the bronze age there was a village on the hill of Castiglione on Ischia, between Porto d'Ischia and Casamicciola, as excavations show. These remains are characteristic of what has been called 'appennine civilization,' which extended from Romagna to Puglia and from Umbria to Lucania. Traces of this culture have also been found in the Grotta delle Felci on Capri and in the Grotta Nicolucci at Sorrento.

Pre-history ends and history begins with the arrival of the Greeks at the beginning of the eighth century B.C. The islanders continued to live on Castiglione, while the new settlers founded another village on the promontory of Monte di Vico. These were almost certainly Euboeans from Calchis and Eretria who, after preliminary investigations of the East coast of Italy, sailed round to the West and occupied Ischia, a convenient foothold for the future colonization of the mainland. The Greeks called their city (and also the whole island)

¹ *Origine e Passato dell' Isola d'Ischia*—G. Buchner & A. Rittmann (Naples, 1948)—the source of nearly all the geological and historical facts mentioned here.

² In a prehistoric cave at San Ciro on the Bay of Palermo were found 'the bones of two species of hippopotamus . . . With these were associated the remains of *Elephas antiquus*, and bones of the genera *Bos*, *Cervus*, *Sus*, *Ursus*, *Canis*, and a large *Felis*'—Sir Charles Lyall: *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man*.

Πιθηκοῦσσαι¹. Later, according to Livy and Strabo, they founded on the opposite coast a second town which they called Κύμη². Pliny says that the name Pithecusa was given to Ischia because it was a centre of the trade in ceramics and not 'from the multitude of apes'. The word, according to him, was derived from πύθος, a clay jar, and not from πίθηκος, a monkey. Homer refers to the island as Inarime³ in the *Iliad*, and Virgil uses the same name in the ninth book of the *Aeneid*—

'Dat tellus gemitum et clypeum superintonat ingens;

Qualis in Euboico Baianum littore quondam

Saxea pila cadit, magnis quam mollibus ante

Constructam iaciunt ponto; sic illa ruinam

Prona trahit, penitusque vadis illesa recumbit.

Miscent se maria, et nigrae attolluntur arenae

Tum sonitu Prochita alta tremit, durumque cubile

Inarime Iovis imperiis imposita Typhoeo'.⁴

The myth of Typhoeus was thus early localized in Ischia—as it was in many other places where there were volcanic eruptions. The story of the rebellious giant struck by lightning from Jove's hand and buried under a mountain was one of the popular legends of antiquity. Etna was also commonly considered to be the place of his imprisonment.

The Greeks brought with them the arts of civilization,

¹ Pithecusae—later Pithecusa, in the singular.

² Cuma—later Cumae, in the plural.

³ εἰν Ἀρίμοις in the second book of the *Iliad* has been mistakenly rendered as Inarime by Virgil (with the Roman name Aenaria at the back of his mind)—Sidgwick in his commentary on *Aeneid IX*.

⁴ 'the earth groans and his huge shield thunders over him, just as at times on the Euboean shore of Baiae a mass of masonry falls, which, formed beforehand with huge blocks, they cast into the sea; so in its fall it crashes headlong down and lies deep, shattered in the shallows. The seas are troubled and the black sands are stirred up. Then Procida trembles to its depths at the sound and Inarime, placed by Jove's command over Typhoeus, a hard resting place'—*Aeneid IX* 709–716.

particularly the art of pottery. It is an interesting fact that the architectural ornaments of terracotta found at Pompeii were made in Pithecusa. Even as late as 1838 ceramics were, next to wine, the most important product of the island. Now, however, only two furnaces remain, at Casamicciola and Porto d'Ischia. It is known that in 160 B.C. Pithecusan wines travelled as far afield as Sicily, Taranto and Carthage but, more important still as an export, the characteristic black varnished pottery of this period has been found in the South of France, Spain and North Africa.

Besides Apollo, Demeter, Zeus, Hera and the Dioscuri (Castor & Pollux) the god most worshipped by the islanders seems to have been Aristaeus, an agricultural deity. Fruit and vines profited from the volcanic nature of the soil and the local wine was highly prized. Iasolini in his book on Ischia (1588) gives the names of the popular wines as 'il Sorbigno, il Greco, il Latino, il Coda cavallo' (horse's tail).

The modern name of Ischia is derived from the Latin 'Insula Major' (Capri was presumably thought of as 'insula minor'). This was shortened to 'Insula' and then, in local dialect, to 'Iscla', which eventually became 'Ischia'.

HISTORY OF ISCHIA AND PROCIDA

DATES IN ISCHIAN HISTORY

474 BC

Battle at Cuma on the mainland. The Syracusans and the Cumans defeated an Etruscan naval invasion from the North.

88 BC

Marius obtained sanctuary in Ischia on his flight to Africa. Sulla, victorious in the civil war, never forgave the Ischians for sheltering his enemy.

82 BC

Naples fell to Sulla's troops. Ischia, a Neapolitan possession, was ceded to Rome. From this date onwards the town of Pithecusa on Monte di Vico seems to have been abandoned and the island is never mentioned again in antiquity. It is presumed that Sulla took his revenge by destroying the city. The name of Ischia was also changed to Aenaria.

79 AD

Destruction of Pompeii by burning ashes from Vesuvius.

1036 AD

Fortress on Monte di Vico known as Girone or 'castrum Gironis'. There is a reference to a 'count' who was lord of the island.

1301 AD

Last volcanic eruption on Ischia. Lava flow at Arso.

1423 AD

Alphonso I of Aragon took the rock by force. He rebuilt and enlarged its fortifications and presented it, together with the island, to Lucrezia d'Alagno.

1501 AD

In August of this year King Frederick of Naples fled to Ischia before the army of Louis XII of France, taking with him his wife Isabella and his four sons. After a month, betrayed and defeated, Frederick surrendered, to die in exile in France in 1504. For the next two hundred years the island belonged to the Spaniards.

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

1509 AD

Ferrante d'Avalos married Vittoria Colonna in the cathedral of the Città d'Ischia on the 27th December. Besides Costanza d'Avalos, who ruled the island, 'la bella Maria d'Aragone' also lived there. They were great patrons of the arts and the court at Ischia became 'a nest of singing birds'. Among the poets were Paolo Giovio, Bernardo Tasso, Galeazzo di Tarsia, Bernardino Rota, il Chariteo and il Tansillo. The last of these addresses Typhoeus as follows in a sonnet:

Animoso, superbo, empio gigante,
Se tu sapessi quante grazie e quante
bellezze e quai virtù nove e celesti
premon le spalle tue, forse diresti:
più bello è il peso mio di quel d'Atlante!¹

1525 AD

Ferrante killed at the battle of Pavia. One of Italy's greatest warriors, the fires that announced his victories shone along the coast and on the heights of Epomeo.

1538 AD

Eruption of Monte Nuovo at Pozzuoli.

1631 AD

Second recorded eruption of Vesuvius.

1794 AD

Eruption of Vesuvius. Torre del Greco destroyed.

1799 AD

Revolution in Naples, supported by the Ischians. On 1st April a punitive expedition composed of British and Sicilian ships

¹ 'Bold, proud, and impious giant, if you knew what grace, what beauty and what new and heavenly virtues press upon your shoulders, perhaps you would say: my burden is more beautiful than that of Atlas!'

The same thought is expressed in a sonnet by Vittoria Colonna:

'Non cede il carico che felice il preme
(Se nei spirti divini e vera gloria)
A quel che'l vecchio Atlante ancor sostiene'.

HISTORY OF ISCHIA AND PROCIDA

occupied Capri, Ischia and Procida, without a shot being fired. Francesco Bonocore, one of the leaders of the Ischians, was arrested by Captain Troubridge, who, 'forgetting that he belonged to a civilized and free nation,'¹ ordered the prisoners to be flogged. Both Bonocore and Antonio de Luca, the other ringleader, were later hanged with thirty others on Procida.

1804 AD

Eruption of Vesuvius.

1822 AD

Eruption of Vesuvius.

1823 AD

By a decree of Ferdinand I the castle of Ischia became a convict prison for political prisoners.

1881 AD

Serious earthquake at Casamicciola, destroying many buildings.

1912 AD

The castle sold by the State to a private owner. Now in ruins.

1944 AD

Eruption of Vesuvius. Ischia was used by the Royal Air Force as an Air-Sea Rescue Base.

DATES IN THE HISTORY OF PROCIDA

395 AD

Invasion of Alaric and the Visigoths.

1130 AD

The Norman supremacy.

1193 AD

The Svevi in power.

1265 AD

The Angevins in power.

1282 AD

'Sicilian Vespers', rising against the French instigated by John of Procida.

¹ D'Ascia: *Storia d'Ischia*.

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

1325 AD

Tribute paid to Charles I of Sicily.

c.1380 AD

Adinulfo, a descendant of John of Procida, sold the island to Marino Cossa of Ischia.

1420 AD

Michele Cossa nominated 'captain general of the galleys' for life by Giovanna II. Michele also owned land on Ischia.

1424 AD

Invasion of the Genoese.

1442 AD

Turkish invasion.

1518 AD

Procida sacked by Barbarossa.

1529 AD

Emperor Charles V ceded Procida to D. Alfonso d'Avalos.

1544 AD and 1558 AD

Further Turkish invasions.

1610 AD

The island sold to Cesare Pappacoda for 64,000 ducats at the instance of the creditors of the Marchese del Vasto. Later it became the property of the D'Avalos family again.

1736 AD

Bought by the King of Naples for its pheasant shooting.

1744 AD

Handed over to the State.

1792 AD

Declared a city.

1799 AD

de Curtis made Governor with the aid of the English expedition.

1868 AD

Opening of the port of Procida.



Local Dress



The Valley of Atrio di Cavallo

Medical Antiquities

(With notes on Iasolini)

Strabo, Pliny, Statius and Celsus Amelianus all mention the therapeutic virtues of the hot springs of Ischia. They were, however, never exploited during the Roman era, because of the danger of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Most of the organized bathing took place at Baiae and Pozzuoli on the mainland.

A few Roman remains still exist near the Terme Regina Isabella and contemporary votive tablets can be seen in the Naples museum; these were discovered near the Nitroli spring in 1757. The dedicatory inscriptions give thanks for successful cures to Apollo and the nymphs of the spring, the Nitrodes or Nitrodiae. The tablets represent Apollo with a lyre and two or three nymphs at his side, carrying conches or vessels from which they pour the healing water.

It is clear from Pliny that the danger from earthquakes and volcanic action was always present and he mentions one occasion when a small town was swallowed up and a lake appeared in its place ('Pithecussis . . . oppidum haustum profundo, alioque motu terrae stagnum emersisse').¹ This lake can only have been the Lago del Bagno, which Ferdinand II in 1853 converted into the present harbour of Porto d'Ischia by cutting through the narrow bar of land that separated it from the sea. Pliny's story of the lake was regarded as a traveller's tale until modern geological research vindicated him.

The rarest and most interesting book about the medicinal waters of Ischia is by the Neapolitan doctor Iasolini—*De*

¹ cf. also the passage in Virgil previously quoted (p. 107)—'Dat tellus gemitum, etc.'

Rimedi Naturali che sono nell' Isola di Pithecusa; Hoggi detta Ischia ('The Natural Remedies which are to be found in The Island of Pithecusa, To-day called Ischia'). It was published in 1588 at Naples and dedicated to the Lady Geronima Colonna, Duchess of Monteleone ('Illustrissima et Eccellentissima Signora'). Its extreme rarity and interest make a brief summary of it perhaps of value.

The book opens with a short passage on the divine nature of fire, with particular reference to the volcanic nature of Ischia, which Iasolini claims is the best island in the world. To prove this he gives a long quotation from Strabo (Book V) containing the classical references to Ischia in Pindar, Homer and Virgil.

This is followed by the Greek story of the Cercopi, two brothers called Candolus and Atlas, rogues and brigands, who ill-treated all the strangers who fell into their hands. At length they even dared to practise their evil arts against Jupiter himself, who as a punishment turned them into monkeys (πιθήκοι), from which the island where they lived derived its name of Pithecusa (πιθηκοῦσσα).

Ovid and Boccaccio, according to Iasolini, put Typhoeus under Sicily; Virgil and Lucan, on the other hand, located him correctly under Ischia. He summarizes what the learned Giovanio Pontano wrote about Ischia in the second book of his *De Bello Neapolitano*, paying particular attention to the experience of Bartolomeo Pernice, a Genoese merchant travelling to Naples. Passing close to the island Pernice noticed several luminous rocks scattered on the sea shore. This is probably the only eye-witness account of the eruption of 1301.

Iasolini goes on to describe the geographical features of Ischia, its wines and its birds, especially the waterhen, which arrive thin and unfit to eat but become fat and palatable in the winter. This is attributed by some to the fact that they feed on

a certain herb, but Iasolini claims that it is due to swimming in the medicinal waters of a volcanic lake.

A description follows of the various baths and hot springs, giving their location and qualities. The hot springs can be used for cooking, while the waters of Barano make women beautiful and give long life to the inhabitants. Iasolini lists eleven fresh water springs, thirty-five hot springs, one 'fango' (mud-bath), various showers, nineteen 'sudatorii'¹, five sand-baths.

The next section contains a long disquisition on the relative merits of fire and water. Iasolini gives instances of the praise of water in ancient writers, quoting the sacredness of rivers, the use of the sea for commerce. Water, he concludes, is the superior element; baths are mentioned in the *Odyssey*, were used by the Greeks and Romans, and are recommended by Galen 'in whom medicine reached the culmination of perfection'. Baths, as used by the ancients, were of two kinds, taken for pleasure or medicinally. Baccio, Iasolini says, lists three types of men who go to the baths—'those despaired of by the doctors, who go, so to speak, to re-forge their bodies, and for the most part suffer harm from it, often wrongly blaming their doctor and the bath. Others, who take good counsel, come back refreshed and, for the most part, cured of their ailments; for it is very true that, among all the powers of medicine, one sees most miracles at the baths (which almost every day we witness, not without the greatest wonder) and especially in the baths of Ischia. The third class are those who take no heed, who rush in with too much haste, and those thrifty ones who, while they think to avoid great expense, do not realize that baths without the advice of a good doctor are more costly than those undertaken on medical advice'.

Iasolini emphasizes the proper preparations necessary before taking the baths—'And I have observed that all those who take

¹ Literally 'sweat houses'.

baths after first having taken sarsparilla, or *lignumvitae* or china-root and being purged two or three times first (for the reason that the illness demands the said remedies) have all experienced wonderful effects from the baths, being advised by good doctors and not those who pander to the tastes of the sick man, of whom there is no dearth—but woe to the flatterers and to those who accept flattery, that see it and feel it!

To illustrate the fact that moderation in bathing is necessary Iasolini quotes the distich found in the ancient baths of Diocletian—‘worthy to be carved in gold rather than in marble’—

‘Balnea, vina, venus, corrumpunt corpora sana:

Corpora sana dabunt—balnea, vina, venus.’¹

The baths vary every year, dry summers and wet springs making them dangerous. A medical writer, Savonarola (not the Fra Girolamo ‘che fù impiccato ed arso’ in the Piazza Signoria of Florence) goes so far as to say:

‘If the daily temperature of the summer is too hot and he who takes the bath stays there too long he will fall into an acute fever . . . dysentery, pain in the eyes, putrefaction of the private parts and other like diseases, especially if he is a person of a hot and dry constitution’.

After quoting three pages of Galen, Iasolini gives his own precepts for bathing, emphasizing the golden rule—NELLI BAGNI NON BISOGNA SCHERZARE NE PREVARICARE (‘In the baths one should not fool about or go too far’).

Great attention must be paid to the quality of the drinking water used by the bather. Water from the spring on Epomeo (‘aqua di Buceto’) or the water called ‘di Nitroli’ from near Barano are both to be recommended. The practice of drinking the actual waters of the bath, as some people do, is most harmful.

¹ ‘Bathing, wine and love corrupt healthy bodies: healthy bodies are produced by—bathing, wine and love’.

Of food he writes: 'Let the bread that is eaten be well leavened and properly baked, not hot, as it is when freshly taken from the oven, nor in any way tainted or made of badly mixed flour and baked not more than two days ago, or at the most three. Some doctors of the baths prohibit other things and ban all unleavened food and food made of flour, such as 'pastilli' and macaroni, all herbs (and especially when eaten raw), fish, game, buttermilk, butter and all forms of dairy produce, fruits, vegetables, everything bitter, sauces, fried foods and other such things, such as pertain to a more liberal existence. But to tell the truth this is too strict a rule, nor is it commonly observed in the baths. Usually good meat commends itself, fresh eggs and the ordinary everyday condiments, nor is it to be thought or understood that in any way is it prohibited or forbidden to eat (with discretion) both fruit and herbs and other such things which are not so often eaten in the baths. For this reason that, as we have already said above, according to the regulation of the bath no prescription is so important as that everything which is eaten should be chosen with care, and good.'¹

Of wine: 'It is all the more necessary diligently to ensure that one chooses good wines, that have no fault, that are of medium body and substance; that give nourishment without straining the digestion, are not 'austere' nor sweet; of which there is great plenty and abundance in Ischia, so that each man may choose wines according to his taste, "Greci", "Sorbigni", costly, pure, mixed, clear, "small",² and those that contain only a little water and are stronger, or the less strong, as it may be most fitting for the individual. And among all these different sorts of wine I should say that the "Sorbigni", being light

¹ From this passage one can see that Iasolini is more distinguished for commonsense than for elegance of style.

² *cf.* 'small beer'.

wines, are the best, not the heavy wines mixed with "Greek" wine, or at least the clear wines and that called "horse's tail", precisely because they are not very bitter. Because they are wines without fumes and one can drink them without harm, nor do they go to the head, as some do, that send to sleep those who drink them; but they give force and strength to the entrails and limbs of the human body. Those wines that are slightly less austere commend themselves and are better esteemed than those that are light and penetrating.'

And of food again: 'And to be brief, one must abstain from everything that of its nature corrupts, those things that inflame, that are hot and desiccative. For this reason a drink of fresh eggs, if there is no contra-indication, is very suitable for the beginning of a meal; meats that are temperate, such as chickens, pheasants, partridges, the flesh of sucking calves, of small birds, of little goats, and suchlike foods. One must avoid and abstain from meat that is too fat, heavy and too hot.'

Iasolini's Book II advises when and how to bathe, according to the age, sex and physique of the patient. One should not bathe when the weather is too cold or too hot—the Spring and the beginning of the Summer and of the Autumn are the best times of the year. One should wear only white linen trousers '*brevi circa le parti vergognose*' and have the head covered, 'so that the vapours from the baths may not fill the head.' Slow immersion is to be recommended, and one should not remain too long. A patient who stays too long in a hot bath finds his toes and fingers become wrinkled—a bad sign.

After the bath—'the sick man should have himself well dried by his servants and be well covered with a cloak; he should go to bed but, as he lies there, he should not sleep,' as Baccio rightly says in contradiction of Faloppio: 'Let him sweat for an hour more or less and dry himself with a light towel, and do so until he has returned to his former state;¹ let him then

¹ i.e. as he was before entering the bath.

rise from his bed, having first completely dried his sweat and, being well wrapped up, let him walk a while and then eat moderately and afterwards sup, all the time avoiding sleep.'

Iasolini then gives the eighteen rules for bathing of Francesco Aretino, all of them sound commonsense and in accordance with what he has already written.

The remainder of the work describes the peculiar virtues of the various baths in Ischia. For example, the Bagno del Gurgitello cures, among other things, sterility—'for certainly among all the diseases of the uterus, sterility is a signal vice; which without doubt has many causes. Foremost among these is a certain hardness, which in many cases the uterus may have naturally but more often from some accident of it being hot or dry or from the discharge to which women are subject known as leucorrhoea or from the excess of menstrual blood; or even the suppression of this. All of which causes have need of particular consideration and require different kinds and "régimes" of bathing, especially in cases of sterility. To combat the hardness, it is necessary to proceed with softening and moistening agents, as also against the dry and hot distemper. But particularly subject to all three of these causes of sterility are women who are viragoes, that have the nature of men, hotness, dryness, and a certain natural heat of the womb, the which conditions cannot be cured or made better without continued and copious use of moistening and softening baths.' Iasolini later states that he himself knew a lady of quality who was sterile, but after drinking the waters of this bath (not even immersing herself in it) had many fine sons.

There follow forty pages of advice on how to deal with emergencies arising from the use of the baths.

Finally, Iasolini gives a table of diseases of different parts of the body which can be cured by the waters of Ischia, recommending different baths for each disease.

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

The impressive list, with its comforting contradictions, includes the following:—

THE HEAD

Headache—that is, pain in the head that is not long standing but only beginning.

Cold distemper and wetness of the head.

Vertigo.

Epilepsy or the falling sickness.

Loss of memory.

Frenzy, called phrenitis.

To fortify and comfort the brain.

THE NERVES

For spasms.

For paralysis.

For tremor.

For contraction and retraction of the sinews.

THE EYELIDS

For lack of hair in the eyelids.

For inflammation of the eyes, called ophthalmia.

For ulcers of the eyes.

For squinting.

For cataract or primary suffusions.

To make the vision acute.

THE EARS

For pain in the ears.

For whistling, noises and echoes heard in the ears.

For deafness from hot causes.

For ulcers of the ears.

MEDICAL ANTIQUITIES

THE NOSTRILS

For ulcers of the nostrils, called ozaena, and other ulcers that are difficult to cure.

For fleshy excrescences, called sarcomata, other warts, pimples and polyyps.

THE MOUTH, GUMS AND TONGUE

For ulcers of the mouth, the gums and the tongue.

For split lips.

For relaxed and softened gums.

For hard projections, tumours and ulcers of the tongue and impediments of speech.

THE TEETH

For toothache and to keep the teeth firm and white.

THE THROAT, THE JAWS AND THE WINDPIPE

For inflammations of the pipe and swollen tonsils and for the *colonnella*, called relaxed uvula.

For distillations of the gullet.

For roughness of the arterial trachea, called the windpipe.

THE LUNGS AND CHEST

To make the voice good and sonorous.

For diseases of the lungs.

For roughness and other diseases of the chest.

For coughs.

For asthma.

For pleurisy or puncture.

THE HEART

To strengthen the heart.

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

THE BREASTS

For breasts made hard by abundance of milk or scirrhus, but not affected by cancer.

To make the flow of milk copious.

THE STOMACH

For vomiting and nausea.

For wind and flatus.

For hiccoughs.

To induce vomiting.

For rumbling of the stomach.

For acid farting.

For loss of appetite.

THE LIVER

For hardness of the liver.

For the bad habit known as cachexy and to cure and comfort the liver.

For dropsy.

THE SPLEEN

For obstruction of the spleen.

To reduce an enlarged spleen.

THE INTESTINES

For pains in the intestines.

For diseases of the colon.

For dysentery.

For worms.

For colicky pains or iliac disturbances.

THE BOTTOM

For cracks or fissures of the anus.

For ulcers of the podex or of the bottom.

For protuberance of the anus.

MEDICAL ANTIQUITIES

THE KIDNEYS

For pain in the loins.

For gravel and stone in the kidneys.

For hot distempers of the kidneys and of other natural parts.

THE BLADDER

For the retention of urine in the bladder.

For diabetes.

For heat of the urine.

To break up and bring out stones from the kidneys and the bladder.

THE PRIVATE PARTS OF MEN

To excite and stimulate the venereal appetite.

To increase the semen.

To extinguish lust and nocturnal pollutions.

For dilated and varicose veins of the testicles.

For gonorrhea and over-abundance of semen.

For all hard tumours of the testicles.

For warts on the penis.

For twisting of the virile member.

THE PRIVATE PARTS OF WOMEN

To induce menstruation.

For immoderate menses.

For sterility and to aid conception.

For pregnant women.

THE UTERUS

For hardness of the uterus which often prevents conception.

For cold distemper of the uterus accompanied by tumours.

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

THE EXTREMITIES OF THE BODY

For gout in the feet.

For sciatica.

For gout in the hands.

For arthritic pains.

For stiffness and stones in the joints, however caused.

Ischia and Procida: A Historical Anthology

'In front of Misenum lies the island of Prochyta, which has been rent from the Pithecussae. Pithecussae was peopled by a colony of Eretrians and Chalcidians, which was very prosperous on account of the fertility of the soil and the productive gold-mines; however, they abandoned the island on account of civil dissensions, and were ultimately driven out by earthquakes, and eruptions of fire, sea, and hot waters. It was on account of these eruptions, to which the island is subject, that the colonists sent by Hiero, the king of Syracuse, abandoned the island, together with the town which they had built, when it was taken possession of by the Neapolitans. This explains the myth concerning Typhon, who, they say, lies beneath the island, and when he turns himself, causes flames and water to rush forth, and sometimes even small islands to rise in the sea, containing springs of hot water. Pindar throws more credibility into the myth, by making it conformable to the actual phenomena, for the whole strait from Cumaea to Sicily is subigneous, and below the sea has certain galleries which form a communication between the volcanoes of the islands and those of the main-land. He shows that Aetna is on this account of the nature described by all, and also the Lipari Islands, with the regions around Dicaearchia, Neapolis, Baiæ, and the Pithecussae. And mindful hereof, Pindar says that Typhon lies under the whole of this space:

"Now indeed the sea-girt shores beyond Cumæ, and Sicily, press on his shaggy breast."

"Timæus, who remarks that many paradoxical accounts were related by the ancients concerning the Pithecussae, states, nevertheless, that a little before his time, Mount Epomeus, in

the middle of the island, being shaken by an earthquake, vomited forth fire; and that the land between it and the coast was driven out into the sea. That the powdered soil, after being whirled on high, was poured down again upon the island in a whirlwind. That the sea retired from it to a distance of three stadia, but after remaining so for a short time it returned, and inundated the island, thus extinguishing the fire. And that the inhabitants of the continent fled at the noise, from the sea-coast, into the interior of Campania. It seems that the hot-springs here are a remedy for those afflicted with gravel.'

—STRABO, *Geography*.¹

'In the gulf of Pozzuoli are Pandateria, Prochyta (so called not after Aeneas's nurse but because it was formed of soil deposited by the current from Aenaria), Aenaria (named from having given anchorage to the fleet of Aeneas but called Inarime in Homer) and Pithecusa (named not from its multitude of monkeys, as some people have supposed, but from its pottery factories).'

—PLINY, *Natural History* III, 82 (translation H. Rackham).

'Before our time also among the Aeolian Islands near Italy, as well as near Crete, there emerged from the sea one island 2,500 paces long, with hot springs, and another in the 3rd year of Olympiad 163 in the bay of Tuscany, this one burning with a violent blast of air; and it is recorded that a great quantity of fish were floating round it, and that people who ate of them immediately expired.'² So also the Monkey Islands [Pithecussae

¹ Hamilton & Falconer's translation (1854).

² Pliny (AD 23-79) himself fell a victim to the spirit of scientific enquiry, as he died while investigating the great eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79.

=Ischia] are said to have risen in the bay of Campania, and later one among them, Mount Eposos, is said to have suddenly shot up a great flame and then to have been levelled with the surface of the plain. In the same plain also a town was sucked down into the depths, and another earthquake caused a swamp to emerge, and another overturned mountains and threw up the island of Procida.'

—PLINY, *op. cit.*

'Preme il mare così quando s'adira
In Inarime allor che Tifeo piagne'¹

PETRARCH, *Trionfo della Castità*.

'Da peso e fuoco oppresso e cinto d'acqua
Arde, piange e sospira in varie tempre'²

—VITTORIA COLONNA.

'Procida is a small island but from it nevertheless came a great man, John, who, not fearing the dreaded crown of Charles and mindful of a great injury, in revenge took from him Sicily and would have dared greater things if it had been allowed him.'

—PETRARCH.

'John of Procida, a Sicilian nobleman, took it so to heart that the purity of his wife should have been forcibly stained that he set himself to use all means in his power to avenge himself and the wrongs of others.'

—BOCCACCIO.

¹ 'The sea rages thus when it grows wrath at Inarime and Typhoeus weeps.'

² 'Held down by a fiery mass and girdled with water he burns, weeps and sighs according to his moods.'

'Vedete Carlo Ottavo che discende
Dall' Alpe, e seco à il fior di tutta Francia;
Che passa il Liri, e tutto il regno prende
Senza stringere spada, e bassar lancia;
Fuorchè lo scoglio che a Tifeo si stende
Sulle braccia, sul petto e sulla pancia'¹

—ARIOSTO.

From Vesuvius:

'Les images s'entr'ouvrent maintenant sur quelques points; je découvre subitement et par intervalles Portici, Caprée, Ischia, le Pausilippe, la mer parsemée des voiles blanches des pêcheurs et la côte du golfe de Naples, bordée d'orangers: c'est le paradis vu de l'enfer.'

—CHATEAUBRIAND: *Voyage en Italie* (1804).

'Naples, 21 Mars (1817)—Je me sens possédé par ce noir chagrin d'ambition qui me poursuit depuis deux ans. A la manière des Orientaux, il faut agir sur le physique. Je m'embarque, je fais quatre heures de mer, et me voilà à Ischia, avec une lettre de recommandation pour don Fernando.

'Il me conte qu'en 1806 il s'est retiré à Ischia, et qu'il n'a pas vu Naples depuis l'usurpation française, qu'il abhorre. Pour se consoler du manque de théâtre, il élève une quantité de rossignols dans les volières superbes. "La musique, cet art sans modèle dans la nature, autre que le chant des oiseaux, est aussi comme lui une suite d'interjections. Or une interjection est un

¹ 'See Charles VIII descend from the Alps, bringing with him the flower of all France. See him pass the Liri and take the whole realm without drawing sword or dropping lance! Until he comes to that rock which lies on the arms, chest and belly of Typhoeus!'

This refers to the heroic defence of Ischia under Inaco d'Avalos in 1496.



Vesuvius in Eruption



Pozzuoli

cri de la passion, et jamais de la pensée. La pensée peut produire la passion; mais l'interjection n'est jamais que de l'émotion, et la musique ne saurait exprimer ce qui est sèchement pensé." Cet amateur délicat ajoute: "Mes alouettes ont quelque-fois le matin des *falsetti* qui me rappellent Marchesi et Pacchiarotti."

'Je passe quatre heures fort agréables avec don Fernando, qui nous déteste, et les bons habitants d'Ischia. Ce sont des sauvages africains. Bonhomie de leur patois. Ils vivent de leurs vignes. Presque pas de trace de civilisation, grand avantage quand le p . . . et ses r . . . font toute la civilisation. Un homme du peuple, à Naples, vous dit froidement: "L'année dernière, au mois d'août, j'eus un malheur"; ce qui veut dire: "L'année dernière, au mois d'août, j'assassinai un homme." Si vous lui proposez de partir un dimanche à trois heures du matin, pour le Vesuve, il vous dit, frappé d'horreur: "Moi, manquer la sainte messe!"

'Des rites s'apprennent par coeur: si vous admettez les bonnes actions, elles peuvent être *plus ou moins* bonnes: de là l'examen personnel, et nous arrivons au protestantisme et à la gaieté d'un methodiste anglais.'

STENDHAL (HENRI BEYLE)—*Rome, Naples et Florence* (1817).

'Shadowy Aornos darkened o'er the helm
The horizontal aether; Heaven stripped bare
Its depths over Elysium, where the prow
Made the invisible water white as snow;
From that Typhaean mount, Inarime,
There streamed a sunbright vapour, like the standard
Of some aethereal host;
Whilst from all the coast,
Louder and louder, gathering round, there wandered
Over the oracular woods and divine sea

Prophesyings which grew articulate—

They seize me—I must speak them!—be they fate!

—SHELLEY: *Ode To Naples*¹ (1820).

‘En parlant ainsi, nous descendions légèrement les rues en pente de Procida. Nous arrivâmes bientôt sur la *marine*. C’est ainsi qu’on appelle la plage, voisine de la rade ou du port dans l’archipel et sur les côtes d’Italie. La plage était couverte de barques d’Ischia, de Procida et de Naples, que la tempête de la veille avait forcées de chercher un abri dans ses eaux. Les marins et les pêcheurs dormaient au soleil, au bruit décroissant des vagues, ou causaient par groupes assis sur le môle. A notre costume et au bonnet de laine rouge qui recouvrait nos cheveux, ils nous prirent pour de jeunes matelots de Toscane ou de Gênes qu’un des bricks qui portent l’huile ou le vin d’Ischia avait débarqués à Procida.’

—LAMARTINE: *Les Confidences* (1849).

‘Pendant le repas nous fûmes servis par des femmes de l’île de *Procida*, dont le costume, dans le style grec, est très élégant: il consiste en une robe de drap vert, ouverte sur le devant comme une simarre turque: les manches et le tour en sont bordés d’un galon d’or. C’est un vêtement de luxe, car il nécessite en-dessous une toilette complète composée d’une jupe de soie et d’un corset en satin blanc brodé en or. Ces femmes portent à leur cou de gros grains d’or, de corail et de perles; leurs boucles d’oreilles sont énormes et en perles fines, avec une pierre précieuse au milieu. Il y en a dont le poids va jusqu’à seize onces et qui valent deux cents ducats “900 francs”. Elles les

¹ Celebrating the proclamation of a Constitutional Government at Naples.

attachent par un cordon qui vient nouer au-dessus de la tête. Pour chaussures elles portent des mules en drap d'or et des bas de soie amaranthe; elles se coiffent avec un mouchoir de soie qu'elles serrent sur le front, laissant pendre les deux bouts sur leurs épaules. On comprend que tant de luxe ne se déploie que les dimanches et les fêtes. Les hommes y portent le bonnet phrygien. D. Francesco nous parla d'un usage que l'on pourrait qualifier de crime de *lèse-amour*; c'est celui qu'elles ont de comprimer leur poitrine dans un corset entièrement garni de baleines; cette cuirasse est faite de façon à empêcher le développement de la gorge et les rend presque toutes voûtées.'

—AUDOT: *L'Italie* (1834).

'Les faisans étaient autrefois en grande abondance à Procida et la chasse en était réservée au roi; à ce sujet, D. Francesco nous raconta une histoire assez plaisante. Pour les conserver et les laisser pulluler, l'intendant conçut l'heureuse idée de faire tuer tous les chats, et d'obtenir un décret du roi qui les proscrivait de l'île; il en resulta que les rats s'y multiplièrent tellement, que tout était dévoré par ces animaux, jusques aux morts qu'ils deterraient. Les paysans, ruinés et désolés, allèrent se jeter aux pieds du roi qui revoqua son arrêt, et en rendit un de rappel pour les proscrits.'

—AUDOT, op. cit.

'Les habitans de Procida, *Prochyta*, passent pour les meilleurs marins de l'Italie, et l'air est si bon dans leur île, qu'ils poussent leur carrière jusqu'à un âge très-avancé.' —AUDOT, op. cit.

'... je résolu d'aller à Ischia, qui est aujourd'hui pour Naples ce que Baia était pour les Anciens, le rendezvous de la bonne société pour ses bains d'eaux minérales.'

—AUDOT: op. cit.

‘En 1440, Alphonse d’Aragon en chassa tous les habitans mâles, et les remplaça par des Espagnols et des Catalans de son armée, auxquels il fit épouser les veuves et les filles des Ischiotes expulsés.’

—AUDOT, op. cit.

‘Elle (Ischia) peut être regardée comme un immense vignoble; ses fruits sont exquis, et ses figues ont été vautées par Horace . . . et ses habitans sont spirituels et industrieux.’

—AUDOT, op. cit.

On Epomeo: ‘Descendus de nos paisibles montures, un bon anachorète nous reçoit à la porte de son ermitage; il nous conduit par un corridor obscur sur une petite terrasse ouverte et située au bord d’un précipice. Il est impossible d’éprouver une sensation plus vive, et une plus agréable surprise que celle que nous cause la nouveauté de la scène qui se présente à nos regards . . . Notre vue embrasse le territoire de *Casamice*, d’*Ischia*, de *Lacco*, de *Foria*, et des petits villages et hameaux semés sur la montagne même. L’île entière, vue de ce sommet, ressemble à une miniature, et présente les couleurs les plus brillantes et les teintes les plus harmonieuses. L’ermitage est entièrement taillé dans le roc, à l’exception de la seule façade de la chapelle qui est en maçonnerie. Le petit sanctuaire conserve sa simplicité primitive, malgré sa renommée de pèlerinage qui y attire toujours un concours très-nombreux. Le paisible habitant de cet antre mène une vie contemplative dans cette retraite la plus propre à nourrir les sentimens les plus purs, il y est pour ainsi dire placé entre le ciel et la terre.’

—AUDOT, op. cit.

Of Casamicciola: ‘C’est ici que l’on afflue de tous les points du royaume, et que se trouve réunie toute la bonne société.

Nous visitâmes en détail l'établissement des bains publics, où règnent une propreté et un ordre exemplaire, et où trois cents pauvres malades viennent chaque année se faire guérir aux frais de l'hôpital de Naples. Ces malheureux commencent par les bains, puis on les plonge dans le sable qui, même sous l'eau, conserve une chaleur brûlante.'

—AUDOT, op. cit.

'Près de Casamice est un rocher d'ancienne lave formant caverne, où l'on rafraîchit les fruits et les boissons aussi fortement qu'avec de la glace: il n'est pas possible d'y rester plusieurs minutes sans souffrir des douleurs insupportables. Cette fraîcheur est d'autant plus étonnante, qu'elle n'est jamais accompagnée de vent. Il y a apparence qu'elle doit sa naissance à la prodigieuse quantité de nitre, dont tout le terrain abonde.'

—AUDOT, op. cit.

'De retour de notre course, D. Francesco me fit servir un dîner dans lequel figurèrent des lapins, des poules d'eau et des volailles dont l'île abonde, et nous y bûmes l'excellent vin qu'elle fournit, mais il avait été obligé d'envoyer chercher la viande et le pain à Naples.'

—AUDOT, op. cit.

'Ils nous apportaient toujours, pour le repas de midi, quelques crabes ou quelques anguilles de mer, aux écailles plus luisantes que le plomb fraîchement fondu. La mère les faisait frire dans l'huile des oliviers . . . Quelques concombres frits de même et découpés en lanières dans la poêle, quelques coquillages frais, semblables à des moules, et qu'on appelle *frutti de mare*, fruits de mer, composaient pour nous ce frugal dîner, le principal et le plus succulent repas de la journée. Des raisins muscats aux longues grappes jaunes, cueillis le matin par

Graziella, conservés sur leur tige et sous leurs feuilles, et servis sur des corbeilles plates d'osier tressé, formaient le dessert. Une tige ou deux de fenouil vert et cru trempé dans le poivre et dont l'odeur d'anis parfume les lèvres et relève le coeur nous tenaient lieu de liqueurs et de café, selon l'usage des marins et des paysans de Naples.'—LAMARTINE: *Les Confidences* (1849)

'Quand le soleil baissait, nous faisons de longues courses à travers l'île. Nous la traversons dans tous les sens. Nous allons à la ville acheter le pain ou les légumes qui manquaient au jardin d'Andrea. Quelquefois nous rapportons un peu de tabac, cet *opium* du marin, qui l'anime en mer et qui le console à terre. Nous rentrions à la nuit tombante, les poches et les mains pleines de nos modestes munificences. La famille se rassemblait, le soir, sur le toit qu'on appelle à Naples l'*astrico*, pour attendre les heures du sommeil. Rien de si pittoresque, dans les belles nuits de ce climat, que la scène de l'*astrico*, au clair de la lune . . . On y voit la vieille mère filer, le père fumer sa pipe de terre cuite à la tige de roseau, les jeunes garçons s'accouder sur le rebord et chanter en longues notes tramantes ces airs marins ou champêtres dont l'ascent prolongé ou vibrant a quelque chose de la plainte du bois torturé par les vagues ou de la vibration stridente de la cigale au soleil; les jeunes filles enfin, avec leurs robes courtes, les pieds nus, leurs sou-brevestes vertes et galonnées d'or ou de soie, et leurs longs cheveux noirs flottants sur leurs épaules, enveloppés d'un mouchoir noué sur la nuque, à gros noeuds, pour préserver leur chevelure de la poussière.

'Elles y dansent souvent seules ou avec leurs soeurs; l'une tient une guitare, l'autre élève sur sa tête un tambour de basque entouré de sonnettes de cuivre. Ces deux instruments, l'un plaintif et léger, l'autre monotone et sourd, s'accordent merveilleusement pour rendre presque sans art les deux notes

alternatives du coeur de l'homme: la tristesse et la joie. On les entend pendant les nuits d'été sur presque tous les toits des îles ou de la campagne de Naples, même sur les barques; ce concert aérien, qui poursuit l'oreille de site en site, depuis la mer jusqu'aux montagnes, ressemble aux bourdonnements d'un insecte de plus, que la chaleur fait naître et bourdonner sous ce beau ciel. Ce pauvre insecte, c'est l'homme! qui chante quelques jours devant Dieu sa jeunesse et ses amours, et puis qui se tait pour l'éternité. Je n'ai jamais pu entendre ces notes repandues dans l'air, du haut des astricos, sans m'arrêter et sans me sentir le coeur serré, prêt à éclater de joie intérieure ou de mélancholie plus forte que moi.' —LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

Of Ischia: 'Is it a delightful spot, and the homeliness of its accommodations is not without its charms . . . While at Ischia, we ascended the Monte di Vico, and Monte d'Epopeo, which command the most enchanting views imaginable. A hermit resides in a cave at the summit of the latter; and did the honours of his rude dwelling with much urbanity and intelligence. The ascent is exceeding abrupt; and the latter part of it we were compelled to accomplish on foot, leaving our mules behind us. From the hermitage, the island is looked down on, with its vines and figs, presenting a mass of brilliant verdure, only broken by the stone terraces that crown nearly all the flat-roofed houses; many of them surrounded with rustic trellis-work, overgrown by flowering plants, or vines. The blue and sparkling sea is spread out as if to serve as a mirror to the azure sky that canopies it; and the white sails that float on it, resemble swans gliding over some vast and tranquil lake. The hermit seemed gratified with our lively admiration of the prospect from his dwelling; and assured us, that use had not palled the pleasure it afforded him.

' "I know not whether it appears more lovely," said he

“when sparkling in the bright beams of the morning; or when the sun sinks into the sea, casting its red light over the scene.”

‘On returning, our guide led us by a still more abrupt path than the one by which we had ascended; and the mode by which the muleteers got their mules down some of the worst parts of the route surprised me. A few of them went below, while others forced the animal head-foremost to the edge of the summit of the steep; and, holding it by the tail, to prevent it from falling, let it gradually descend, until the men beneath, who had clambered up a portion of the ascent to encounter it, were enabled to grasp it, and assist it to the bottom. The loud neighing of the mules, and the cries, exclamations, and curses of the muleteers, formed a chorus by no means harmonious; and when the feat was accomplished, the laughter in which the men indulged, as they imitated the kicking and neighing of the mules, was irresistibly comic.’

—THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON: *The Idler in Italy* (1839).

‘During our *séjour* at Ischia, we were much gratified by the music heard nightly in the little hamlets, as we returned from our evening rides: groups of three and four persons, with guitars, were seen seated on a terrace, or on a bench before their houses, singing Neapolitan airs, and barcaroles, in a style that would not have offended the ears of Rossini himself; while, in another quarter might be found a party dancing the merry tarantella, to the sound of a guitar and tambourine, to which their voices, as well as their feet, kept perfect measure. Rarely did we pass two hundred yards without meeting such groups; and when we paused to listen to their songs, or see the dancing, they invariably offered us seats, and then continued, without any embarrassment.

‘The fête-dress of the female inhabitants of Ischia is very picturesque and becoming, and totally unlike that of the

Neapolitan women: the men wear scarlet caps, of the Phrygian shape, and are a fine-looking and hardy race. The females are much handsomer than those of Naples; and have very expressive countenances, and gentle manners. The mud, sand, and mineral baths at Ischia are considered very beneficial in rheumatic and cutaneous diseases, and are much frequented.

'On our return we stopped to see the island of Procida, which, though much inferior to Ischia, is well worthy of being visited. Here wine, bread, grapes and figs, of the most delicious quality, were offered to us by the women; and one or two of the houses which we entered, though homely to the last degree, were so clean, that the fruit presented to us in them might be eaten without the smallest apprehension or dread.'

—THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON, *op. cit.*

On Epomeo:

'Et nous aux penchants de ses verts Elysées
 Sur ses bords où l'Amour eût caché son Eden
 Au murmure plaintif des vagues apaisées
 Aux rayons endormis de l'astre élyséen,
 Sous ce ciel où la vie ou le bonheur abonde.
 Sur ces rives que l'oeil se plaît à parcourir,
 Nous avons respiré cet air d'un autre monde.
 Elise! et cependant on dit qu'il faut mourir.'

—LAMARTINE.¹

'Yesterday we dined on Mount Vesuvius; to-day we were to have dined on its victim, Pompeii: but "by the grace of God, which passeth all understanding", since Bartolomeo himself, that weather soothsayer, did not foresee this British weather, we are prevented. In the meantime, all this week and the

¹ Quoted by D'Ascia, who calls him 'the Bard of Bordeaux'.

next is replete with projects to Istria,¹ Procite, etc. etc. so God only knows when I can worship again my Diana of Ephesus.'

—Letter to EMMA from SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON.

'Their as been a prince paying us a visit. He is sixty years of age, one of the first families, and as allways lived at Naples; and when I told him I had been at Caprea, he asked me if I went there by land. Only think what ignorance! I staired at him, and asked him who was his tutor.'

—LADY HAMILTON in a letter to Greville.

'“O God,” says she, “your eccellenza is very ungratefull! He as been so good as to make your face the same as he made the face of the Blessed Virgin's, and you don't esteem it a favour!” “Why,” says I, “did you ever see the Virgin?” “O yes,” says she, “you are like every picture that there is of her, and you know the people at Iscea fel down on their knees to you, and beg'd you to grant them favours in her name.”'

—Dialogue between LADY HAMILTON and her Italian maid,
in a letter to Greville.

'C'était la saison où les pêcheurs du Pausilippe, qui suspendent leur cabane à ses rochers et qui étendent leurs filets sur ses petites plages de sable fin, s'éloignent de la terre avec confiance et vont pêcher la nuit à deux ou trois lieues en mer, jusque sous les falaises de *Capri*, de *Procida*, d'*Ischia*, et au milieu du golfe de Gaète.

Quelques-uns portent avec eux des torches de resine, qu'ils allument pour tromper le poisson. Le poisson monte à la

¹ Presumably Ischia?

lueur, croyant que c'est le crépuscule du jour. Un enfant, accroupi sur la proue de la barque, penche en silence la torche inclinée sur la vague, pendant que le pêcheur, plongeant de l'oeil au fond de l'eau, cherche à apercevoir sa proie et à l'envelopper de son filet. Ces feux, rouges comme des foyers de fournaise, se reflètent en longs sillons ondoyants sur la nappe de la mer, comme les longues traînées de lueurs qu'y projette le globe de la lune. L'ondoiement des vagues les fait osciller et en prolonge l'éblouissement de lame en lame aussi loin que la première vague la reflète aux vagues qui la suivent.¹

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

'C'était la côte dentelée et à pic de la charmante île d'Ischia que je devais tant habiter et tant aimer plus tard. Elle m'apparaissait, pour la première fois, nageant dans la lumière, sortant de la mer, se perdant dans le bleu du ciel, et éclore comme d'un rêve de poète pendant le léger sommeil d'une nuit d'été . . . '

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

Of the area round Naples:

'Here the plain of to-day is the mountain to-morrow.'

—LADY MORGAN: *Italy* (1821).

'L'île d'*Ischia*, qui sépare le golfe de Gaète du golfe de Naples, et qu'un étroit canal sépare elle-même de l'île de Procida, n'est qu'une seule montagne à pic dont la cime blanche et foudroyée plonge ses dents ébréchées dans le ciel. Ses flancs abruptes creusés de vallons, de ravines, de lits de

¹ Night fishing is still carried on by these methods on the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic coasts.

torrents, sont revêtus du haut en bas de châtaigniers d'un vert sombre. Ses plateaux les plus rapprochés de la mer et inclinés sur les flots portent des chaumières, des villas rustiques et des villages à moitié cachés sous les treilles de vigne. Chacun de ces villages a sa *marine*. On appelle ainsi le petit port où flottent les barques des pêcheurs de l'île et où se balancent quelques mâts de navires à voile latine. Les vergues touchent aux arbres et aux vignes de la côte.

'Il n'y a pas une de ces maisons suspendues aux pentes de la montagne, cachée au fond de ses ravins, pyramidant sur un de ses plateaux, projetée sur un de ses ceps, addossée à son bois de châtaigniers, ombragée par son groupe de pins, entourée de ses arcades blanches et festonnée de ses treilles pendantes, qui ne fût en songe la demeure idéale d'un poète ou d'un amant.'

—LAMARTINE, op. cit.

'*Graziella* n'avait eu ni la pensée ni le temps de s'arranger une toilette de nuit. Elle s'était élancée pieds nus à la fenêtre, dans le désordre où elle dormait sur son lit . . . Sa chemise, nouée autour du cou, ne laissait apercevoir qu'une taille élevée et mince où se modelaient à peine sous la toile les premières ondulations de la jeunesse. Ses yeux, ovales et grands, étaient de cette couleur indécise entre le noir foncé et le bleu de mer qui adoucit le rayonnement par l'humidité du regard et qui mêle à proportions égales dans les yeux de femme la tendresse de l'âme avec l'énergie de la passion . . .'

—LAMARTINE, op. cit.

. . . nous essayâmes de lire deux ou trois fois, en les traduisant en langue vulgaire du pays, des passages de Foscolo et quelques beaux fragments de notre Tacite.

'Nous pensions que ces soupirs patriotiques de l'exile italien

et ces grandes tragédies de Rome impériale feraient une forte impression sur notre naïf auditoire; car le peuple a de la patrie dans les instincts, de l'héroïsme dans le sentiment et du drame dans le coup d'oeil . . . Mais nous nous aperçûmes vite que ces déclamations et ces scènes si puissantes sur nous n'avaient point d'effet sur ces âmes simples. Le sentiment de la liberté politique, cette aspiration des hommes de loisir, ne descend pas si bas dans le peuple.

'Ces pauvres pêcheurs ne comprenaient pas pourquoi Ortis se désespérait et se tuait, puisqu'il pouvait jouir de toutes les vraies voluptés de la vie: se promener sans rien faire, voir le soleil, aimer sa maîtresse et prier Dieu sur les rives vertes et grasses de la Brenta. "Pourquoi se tourmenter ainsi," disaient-ils, "pour des idées qui ne pénètrent pas jusqu'au coeur?" Que lui importe que ce soient les Autrichiens ou les Français qui règnent à Milan? C'est un fou de se faire tant de chagrin pour de telles choses. Et ils n'écoutaient plus':

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

On reading *Paul et Virginie* to Graziella—'Avant que je fusse arrivé au milieu de l'histoire, la pauvre enfant avait oublié sa réserve un peu sauvage avec moi. Je sentais la chaleur de sa respiration sur mes mains. Ses cheveux frissonnaient, sur mon front. Deux ou trois larmes brûlantes, tombées de ses joues, tachaient les pages tout près de mes doigts.'

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

' . . . l'accent à la fois saccadé et plaintif de ces femmes des îles, qui rappelle, comme dans l'Orient, le ton soumis de l'esclave dans les palpitations mêmes de l'amour . . . '

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

'Elle était *corailleur*, c'est-à-dire elle apprenait à travailler le corail. Le commerce et la manufacture du corail formaient alors la principale richesse de l'industrie des villes de la côte d'Italie.'

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

'La jeune fille me mena par la main dans sa chambre, pour me faire admirer les petits ouvrages de corail qu'elle avait déjà tournés et polis. Ils étaient proprement rangés sur du coton dans de petits cartons sur le pied de son lit. Elle voulut en façonner un morceau devant moi. Je faisais tourner la roue du petit tour avec le bout de mon pied, en face d'elle, pendant qu'elle présentait la branche rouge de corail à la soie circulaire qui la coupait en grinçant. Elle arrondissait ensuite ces morceaux, en les tenant du bout des doigts, et en les usant contre le meule.'

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

... costumes plus riches et plus élégants particuliers aux femmes de leur île: des mouchoirs de soie rouge pour pendre derrière la tête en long triangle sur les épaules; des souliers sans talon, qui n'emboîtent que les doigts du pied, brodés de paillottes d'argent; des soubrevestes de soie rayée de noir et de vert: ces vestes galonnées sur les coutures flottent ouvertes sur les hanches, elles laissent apercevoir pardevant la finesse de la taille et les contours du cou orné de colliers; enfin de larges boucles d'oreilles ciselées, où les fils d'or s'entrelacent avec de la poussière de perles. Les plus pauvres femmes des îles grecques portent ces parures et ces ornements. Aucune détresse ne les forcerait à s'en défaire. Dans les climats où le sentiment de la beauté est plus vif que sous notre ciel et où la vie n'est que l'amour, la parure n'est pas un luxe aux yeux de la femme; elle est sa première et presque sa seule nécessité.'

—LAMARTINE, *op. cit.*

'Il y a tant de puces à Naples que c'est, je crois, ce que la Vénus Callipyge y cherche.'

SAINTE-BEUVE: *Voyage En Italie* (1839).¹

'Vu Ischia, songé à Farcy, à Lamartine: impression triste, quant à moi. Ischia me paraît aride: le volcan éteint, l'Epomée, a jadis crevé par la base et a recouvert la plage d'informes et hideuses scories: c'est laid. Ce volcan était en train de devenir quelque chose, il a manqué sa fortune de volcan; il a fait long feu.

'A Ischia. Les lieux les plus vantés de la terre sont tristes et désenchantés lorsqu'on n'y porte plus ses espérances. Tout golfe de Baia y devient *il mare morto*.

'Est-ce parce que j'ai été parricide pour Lamartine (*tu quoque fili*—moi aussi, hélas!) que ce golfe de Baia, si doux pour lui, m'a paru amer? Combien j'éprouve le contraire de ce que j'y voyais d'avance sur la foi de Lamartine! Cette côte est déserte, aride, bouleversée, frappée de mort: la vie s'est déplacée, elle est vis-à-vis sur l'autre plage, à Sorrento. A Baia, c'est la ruine, l'abandon; la Jérusalem et la Sodome du golfe de Naples; un air de désolation s'étend sur cette petite Babylone, les délices du monde romain.'

—SAINTE-BEUVE, *op. cit.*

'Ce soir, 31 mai, en descendant du Vésuve, à cinq heures et demie, admirable vue du golfe: fines projections des îles sur une mer blanche, sous un ciel un peu voilé; ineffable beauté! Découpures élégantes: Capri sévère, Ischia prolongée, les bizarres et gracieux chaînons de Procida; le cap Misène isolé avec sa langue de terre mince et jolie, le chateau de l'Oeuf en

¹ A notebook unpublished during Saint-Beuve's lifetime.

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petit l'imitant, le Pausilippe entre eux doucement jeté: en tout un grand paysage de lointain dessiné par Raphael—Oh! vivre là, y aimer quelqu'un et puis mourir!

—SAINTE-BEUVE, *op. cit.*

There was an Old Person of Ischia,
Whose conduct grew friskier and friskier;
He danced hornpipes and jigs, and ate thousands of figs,
That lively old Person of Ischia.

—EDWARD LEAR: *A Book of Nonsense* (1846).

'I have seen and heard the strong and too true expression used, "This is the negation of God erected into a system of Government."'¹

—GLADSTONE: *Two letters to the Earl of Aberdeen on the State Prosecutions of the Neapolitan Government.* (1851)

'The prisons of Naples, as is well known, are another name for the extreme of filth and horror.'

—GLADSTONE, *op. cit.*

'When I left Naples, in February, the Baron Porcari was confined in the Maschio of Ischia. He was accused of a share in the Calabrian insurrection and was awaiting his trial. This Maschio is a dungeon without light, and 24 feet or palms (I am not sure which) below the level of the sea. He is never allowed to quit it day or night, and no one is permitted to visit him there, except his wife—once a fortnight.'

—GLADSTONE, *op. cit.*

¹ 'E la negazione di Dio eretta a sistema di governo.'



The Grotto of Posillipo, showing Virgil's tomb



The Temple of Isis at Pompeii

Of Carlo Poerio:¹ ' . . . the sentence was not executed; but he has, I gather, been reserved for a fate much harder: double irons for life, upon a remote and sea-girt rock: nay, there may even be reason to fear that he is directly subjected to physical torture. The mode of it, which was specified to me upon respectable though not certain authority, was the thrusting of sharp instruments under the finger-nails.'

—GLADSTONE: *op. cit.*

Of the *Bagno* of Nisida:

'For one half-hour in the week, a little prolonged by the leniency of the superintendent, they were allowed to see their friends outside the prison. This was their sole view of the natural beauties with which they were surrounded. The whole number of them² . . . were confined, night and day, in a single room of about sixteen palms in length by ten or twelve in breadth, and about ten in height; I think with some small yard for exercise. When the beds were let down at night, there was no space whatever between them; they could only get out at the foot, and, being chained two and two, only in pairs.

'Their chains were as follows. Each man wears a strong leather girt round him above the hips. To this are secured the upper ends of two chains. One chain of four long and heavy links descends to a kind of double ring fixed round the ankle. The second chain consists of eight links, each of the same weight and length with the four, and this unites the prisoners together, so that they can stand about six feet apart. Neither of these chains is ever undone day or night. The dress of common felons, which, as well as the felon's cap, was there worn by the late cabinet-minister of King Ferdinand of Naples, is composed

¹ Formerly leader of the Liberal opposition.

² Seventeen.

of a rough and coarse red jacket, with trousers of the same material—very like the cloth made in this country from what is called devil's dust; the trousers are nearly black in colour. On his head he had a small cap, which makes up the suit; it too is of the same material. The trousers button all the way up, that they may be removed at night without disturbing the chains.

'The weight of these chains, I understand, is about eight rotoli, or between sixteen and seventeen English pounds for the shorter one, which must be doubled when we give each prisoner his half of the longer one. The prisoners had a heavy limping movement, much as if one leg had been shorter than the other. But the refinement of suffering in this case arises from the circumstances that here we have men of education and high feeling chained incessantly together. For no purpose are these chains undone; and the meaning of these last words must be well considered: they are to be taken strictly.'

—GLADSTONE, *op. cit.*

'Since I have left Naples, Poerio has sunk to a lower depth of calamity. He has been taken, I understand, from Nisida to Ischia, farther from public interest, and perhaps to some abode like the Maschio of Porcari.'

—GLADSTONE, *op. cit.*

'Going on deck at sun-rise, I found the felucca contending with a head wind, but luckily in a smooth water. On our right, lay high dark mountains thrown into picturesque forms, with shore lined with hamlets and towns. This was Ischia. Ahead was another island, of the same character, resembling a gigantic sea-wall thrown before the bay. This was Capri. On our left, lay a small, low, level island, teeming with life;

and to the north and east of us, opened the glorious Bay of Naples . . .’

—J. FENIMORE COOPER: *Excursions in Italy* (1838).

‘I look, through a vista of five large rooms, by means of doors, directly at the panorama presented by Naples, which town lies directly across the bay, at the reputed distance of eighteen miles; though I see St. Elmo so distinctly, that it appears not half so far. Of course, when seated on the terrace, the view is infinitely more extended. The sea limits it to the West. Ischia, dark, broken, and volcanic, but softened by vegetation and the tints of this luxurious atmosphere comes next: then Procida, low, verdant and peopled. The misty abrupt bluff of Mycenum is the first land on the continent, with the Elysian fields, the port of the Roman galleys, and the “Hundred Chambers”. The site of delicious Baiae is pointed out by the huge pile of castle that lies on the hill-side, and by the ruined condition of all the neighbouring objects of curiosity, such as the Sibyl’s cave, the lake of Avernus, the bridge or mole of Agrippa. Behind a little island called Nisida, the bark of St. Paul must have sailed when he landed at Puteoli, on his way to Rome. The palace of Queen Joan, the grotto of Pausilippo, the teeming city and the bay dotted with sails, follow . . . and a pile of dingy earth, or ashes, just marks the position of Pompeii.’

—J. FENIMORE COOPER, *op. cit.*

‘We hauled up to windward of Procida, sailing through an element so limpid that we saw every rush and stone on the bottom in five fathom water. Having opened the channel between the two islands, we bore up for the town of Ischia, where we arrived a little before sunset. Here a scene presented

itself which more resembled a fairy picture than one of the realities of this everyday world of ours. I think it was the most ravishing thing, in its way, eye of mine ever looked upon. We had the black volcanic peaks of the island for a background, with the ravine-like valleys and mountain-faces, covered with country-houses and groves, in front. The town is near the southern extremity of the land, and lies along the shore for more than a mile on a bit of level formation; but, after passing a sort of bridge or terrace, which I took to be a public promenade, the rocks rose suddenly, and terminated in two or three lofty, fantastic, broken fragment-like crags, which make the south-eastern end of the island. On these rocks were perched some old castles, so beautifully wild and picturesque, that they seemed placed there for no other purpose than to adorn the landscape. By a curvature of the land, these rocks sheltered the roadstead, and the quaint old structures were brought almost to impend over our heads . . . Until that moment I was not fully sensible of the vast superiority of the Italian landscapes over all others. Switzerland astonishes, and it even often delights, by its union of the pastoral with the sublime; but Italian nature wins upon you until you come to love it like a friend . . . The effect is to pour a flood of sensations on the mind that are as distinct from the commoner feelings of wonder that are excited by vastness and magnificence, as the ideas awakened by an exquisite landscape by Claude are different from those we entertain in looking at a Salvator Rosa . . .

'Our "attempts" to obtain lodgings at the town of Ischia were unsuccessful and we shaped our course for a villa on the coast two or three miles distant, where we were received. Our coucher was a little unsophisticated, most of the party using mattresses on the floor; but we had brought tea with us, and made a good supper.

'Arrangements for the night were soon made . . . The idea of putting two people in the same bed, even if married, scarcely

ever comes into the heads of the Europeans of the Continent, nearly every bedroom of the least pretension, if intended for the use of two, having its two beds. I have seen double-beds in Italy, it is true; but they were as large as small houses. That peculiar sentiment of the Western American, who "wondered that any man should be such a hog as to wish a bed all to himself," appears never to have suggested itself to a people so destitute of "energy".

—J. FENIMORE COOPER, *op. cit.*

'The morning was calm, and we pulled towards the western point of Procida. This is one of the few islands of this region that is without any mountain. It is extremely populous, though quite small, having a good deal of shipping. We landed on the point, and, by way of exploring the island, walked to the town. It is the fashion to see a Greek character in this people, who were originally a Greek colony (as indeed were those on the adjacent main); but we saw no more than the same swarthy, dark-eyed race that throngs the streets of Naples.'

—J. FENIMORE COOPER, *op. cit.*

'On a summer evening in 1867, while he was at work on *Peer Gynt*, which is certainly the most Norwegian of all that he has written, he stood looking out upon the Italian island of Ischia. Suddenly he said: "Look at that fine hop-garden!" A Danish friend who was with him made the remark: "But it is not hops; it is grapes," and Ibsen corrected himself. "Yes, you are right! Now and then I have to pull my own ears to realize that I am not in Norway".'

—HALVOLAN KOHT; *The Life of It*

'The island of Ischia is a *monument* of the past; nowadays it presents a different aspect and appears as a *theatre* of ideal beauty—a *temple* of positive interest that fascinates the mind and warms the soul; so that the wayward spirit, and equally the reflective intellect, have always drawn from it brilliant scenes of poetry and treasures of useful discovery.'

—D'ASCIA, *Storia d'Ischia*, 1867.

Questo cadavere era PITECUSA!

Questa bella graziosa fanciulla è ISCHIA!¹

—D'ASCIA, *op. cit.*

Of Ischia in 1724:

'The island continued in its insupportable state; evildoers increased daily. The villages of Barano, Moropane, Fontana and Mt Epomeo were occupied by men who were as uncouth as they were ferocious and untamed.

'One day there was a savage encounter between the inhabitants of the two villages of Barano and Moropane on account of a leather belt; the Moropanesians and the Baranesians cut each others' throats and slaughtered one another indiscriminately until, arousing the ancient enmities and jealousies of the two communities, they made so frightening an extension of the quarrel that they transformed it into a real civil war which agitated the whole island—And for what?—For a leather belt of little value whose ownership was in dispute between a *Baranesian* and a *Moropanesian*!

'This terrible event was so memorable that it remained indelibly impressed on the memories of the men of that time

¹ This corpse was PITHECUSA!

This most beautiful young girl is ISCHIA!

and as it has become a tradition even up to to-day one still hears the vulgar people cry, when they are angry with someone—
 “*Ci voglio far venire la cintura di Barano.*”¹

—D’ASCIA, *Storia d’Ischia*.

(From Pozzuoli)

‘Nisida, Ischia dans le lointain, le cap Misène, ne ressemblent point à des êtres réels, mais à des ombres nobles sur le point d’arriver à la vie.’

—TAINÉ, *Voyage En Italie* (1866).

Of the environs of Naples:

‘. . . tout le paysage alangui et muet semble se reposer de l’être, dormir, non pas écrasé ou roidi par la mort, mais enveloppé doucement dans une paix bienfaisante et monotone. C’est de cette façon que les anciens ont conçu l’*audelà*, l’extinction de la vie; leurs tombeaux ne sont point lugubres; le mort y repose et n’est point souffrant ou anéanti; on lui apporte des mets, du vin, du lait; il vit encore, seulement du grand jour il est passé au crépuscule. Les idées chrétiennes et germaniques, Pascal et Shakspeare, n’ont point à parler ici.’

—TAINÉ, *op. cit.*

‘Dionysius of Halicarnassus will have it that it is called so (Procida) because of the nurse of the Trojan Aeneas, who, voyaging in these seas to consult the Sibyl at Cumae as to the state of his fortunes, buried her here and gave this name to the land that received his spoils.’

—MICHELE PARASCANDOLA, *Cenni Storici Intorno Alla Città ed Isola Di Procida* (1892).

¹ ‘I wish the belt of Barano may come among you!’

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

'The word Procida comes from the Greek προχέειν which means "to pour out". "Poured out" because Procida and Ischia were formerly united and later divided by a volcanic eruption of Epomeo.'¹

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'... the last catastrophe at Casamicciola . . . , one of the worst that history records, on 28th July, 1883, when I found myself only a short distance away and witnessed it, confirms Pliny's opinion that Procida was detached from Ischia by volcanic eruption.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'Here is an enchanting scene—the vision of the superlatively pretty towering city and island of Procida, resplendent in its flourishing verdure, scented in spring by the orange blossom, with its overhanging vines, from which comes a wine like a liqueur, with its famous channel dotted with white sails and furrowed by muscular oarsmen, presents itself, as the poet Gioviano Pontano has depicted it, like a Nymph who uses as a mirror the calm waves of the sea. Three eminences raise it from its flatness as it lies softly extended and from these it took as its emblem three towers,² that is to say the Terra Murata, the Mozzo and the Cottino.

'The sea front, that is divided into two long arms, one to the East and the other to the West, and affords the inhabitants pleasant walks during the summer months, and the abundance of houses of antique construction, partly rebuilt and restored, present a more pleasing picture than one might have formed

¹ Pliny's theory of the origin of the name.

² The crest of John of Procida.

on one's arrival for the first time. Especially at the times when the passenger steamers come and go, for they leave the port and return here in the evening hours, does it wear an imposing aspect, when it is full of passengers disembarking, of relatives, friends, customs officials and *finanzieri*,¹ the curious and the idle onlooker. The sea is very fertile in fish and all kinds of these are found off the shores of the island. There is abundance of fruit, the grapes are exceptionally sweet and the figs excellent, ripening remarkably soon; there is no lack of greenery and there are thistles, big artichokes and fennel, very palatable to eat. Its coastline, seven miles in circumference, with most delightful inlets and promontories because of which it seems here to advance and distend itself into the sea and there to flirt with the sea and retire, coupled with the salubriousness of its air, led Celestino Guicciardini, in his *Mercurio Campano*, to call it a well-formed garden. Procida is two miles from the continent and two from the island of Ischia, eight from Pozzuoli and fourteen from Naples. Both the poet Juvenal and Virgil pronounced it to be the most beautiful, the first preferring it to the city of Rome itself, the second saying that it was next to no other country.'

—PARASCANDOLA, op. cit.

'In 1878 Procida had as many as 120 ships.'

—PARASCANDOLA, op. cit.

'The lack of work has forced a whole colony of sailors to emigrate to Marseilles, Alexandria, Port Said, Buenos Aires, and it is my opinion that there is no part of the world where

¹ Customs officials, similar to our coast guards.

the Procidans have not pitched their tents in the quest for employment.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'The distinctive characteristic of the Procidans is generosity.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'One reads that in the same year 1544 on the Monday following the feast of St John the army of Barbarossa . . . invaded Procida and after having taken hostage one thousand, five hundred people both great and small, men and women, they burnt houses, grain, flax, straw, wood and whatever else they could find.'¹

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'On the 12th day of the month of June, 1558, the army of the Turks, about 150 sail, disembarked at Sorrento and Massa, massacred many people at Sorrento and cruelly took prisoner men and women, monks and nuns, thence passing to Procida.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'The Turks . . . at Procida destroyed everything but the tombs, raping men, women and children.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'However the pirates continued to infest Procida and her inhabitants were constrained to shut themselves up in towers or

¹ The chronicles of Sessa are Parascandola's sources for the tales of pirate invasions.

in the precincts of the Terra Murata, when they were warned by fires, by night or by day, by columns of smoke, by a sentinel who watched continually on Monte della Guardia, a post situated opposite the north-east side of the peak of St Nicholas on Ischia . . . everything was a weapon of defence for them, boiling water, stones, mill-stones and even furniture, when the other arms were used up.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'It is an old tradition that in 1535 the island of Procida was attacked by the ferocious Barbarossa but was defended by the Archangel Michael, its protector, who appeared on the highest point of the island with his flaming sword and, breathing flames and thunderbolts, terrified and dispersed the army of the barbarous aggressor.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'In 1707, having been expelled from Naples, the Duke of Anjou returned as Charles III of Spain and on the 29th July four galleys and two French longboats appeared in the waters of Procida. On his attempting to disembark and despoil the island he was met by the peasants in arms and could achieve nothing.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'The last occupations were those of the French and the English. In fact, on the 29th December, 1798, King Ferdinand IV with Maria Carolina left Naples in a vessel commanded by Nelson. The English fleet anchored at Procida and established itself there in order to blockade Naples, where a provisional government had been set up . . . Procida was the first among

the islands to submit and her example was followed by Ischia. The command of this island and of the fortress had been entrusted by Championnet to Francesco Buonocore. This led to disturbances when the English landed. The people destroyed the tree of liberty but they could not silence the rebels. Buonocore had not remained faithful to the Bourbon family. Troubridge had him put in chains and returned to the anchorage at Procida. He wrote to Palermo for a judge to try the rebels . . . The islands generally received the English favourably enough, raising the royal standard amidst rejoicing . . .'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'Meanwhile Caracciolo had ordered naval conscription to protect the coast from the incursions of the English and to construct a hundred cannon to drive them from Procida . . . On the 16th word went round that the English ships had left Procida and all that remained at the anchorage were one frigate, two corvettes, one light vessel,¹ six long boats with cannon, one warship² and three ships with cannon of large calibre. Caracciolo and the Republicans advanced into the channel of Procida the same evening with 8 warships, 8 gun boats, 2 galliots and some long boats in reserve, but they had the worst of it. While Caracciolo's fleet was taking up its position for battle facing the enemy ships, they on their side placed themselves in such a way that the island batteries could come into action, thus extending their line of battle. Meanwhile a fresh wind began to agitate the sea and the strong current which there was

¹ *Sciabecco* or *stambecco*—an antelope, or wild goat, so a small vessel.

² *Bombardiera*—a warship armed with artillery.

in the channel obliged Caracciolo¹ to retreat, pursued by the royal ships as far as Minisola.'

—PARASCANDOLA, *op. cit.*

'The town of Procida stretches up the slopes of the castle-hill from the seashore in the form of an amphitheatre, backed and interspersed with vineyards, orange groves, and fruit gardens. The houses, with their flat terraced roofs and external staircases, resemble the buildings of modern Greece . . . The island is richly cultivated with vineyards, and fruit gardens, which supply the markets of the Capital, and constitute a source of the prosperity of the inhabitants. The red wines are of a superior quality, but the chief industry is shipbuilding, some of the principal shipowners of S. Italy being natives of Procida. On Michaelmas Day and on the 8th of May the women dress up in Greek costume and dance the tarantella.'

—*A Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy and Sicily*,
Published by John Murray, 1892.

'We now approach the precipitous rock on which the Castle of Ischia guards the approach to the island, whose beautifully varied outline, clothed with luxuriant vegetation and crowned by the commanding ridge of Epomeo, presents one of the loveliest pictures it is possible to conceive.'

—*op. cit.*

¹ Caracciolo was later captured and summarily hanged from the yard-arm of his flagship as it lay off Procida. Both Nelson and Lady Hamilton incurred odium for this action. There is a story, supported by at least two good authorities, that his body afterwards rose from the waves in the Bay of Naples, being seen first by a fisherman and later by others. It was washed ashore and given decent burial.

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

'Its circumference is about 20 miles, exclusive of the sinu-
osities of the coast, its length 6; its greatest breadth about 4 m.'

—op. cit.

'The Mineral Waters are the strongest and most efficacious in
Europe. No spot indeed in the world contains such a number
of hot springs; and many are allowed to run to waste which
would make the fortune of any town in continental Europe.'

—op. cit.

'Many rare ferns and orchids are found in the woods; the
aloe and the prickly pear grow luxuriantly in the hedges; and
the caper climbs wild along the walls.'

—op. cit.

'The oldest rocks hitherto discovered consist of a blue
argillaceous marl. . . . These blue marls underlie the most
ancient volcanic rocks, showing that the latter were erected
whilst the sea covered the country.'

—op. cit.

'Just outside the village (Lacco) to the North is the Convent
of S. Restituta, the Patron Saint of the island. The body of the
saint who suffered martyrdom in Africa by being inclosed alive
in a case and thrown into the sea was cast ashore in the little
bay of S. Montana, beyond the present church where grows
in the sandy soil a flower (*Squilla maritima*) called by the
islanders the Giglio di Santa Restituta from the tradition that it
first sprang up on the spot where the body of the saint was cast.'

—op. cit.

'Although the last flowers—purple asters—are faded, clematis hangs blossoming over a wall, sun lies on the sea, and behind the sun, just opposite me, the outline of Capri can be seen beside the foothills of Sorrento . . . There is the bay, the occasional silhouette of oarsmen in lovely concentrated movement, and just that something which gives a boat its being; in the distance, sailing ships. Then the curve towards Posilippo, the whole margin looking as though it had just been flung out, and to the left the projecting castle, as if wrapped in a cloak or set in front of the sun like one of Rembrandt's figures. And strange the noises: the rapid trotting of little horses, the chattering of primitive wheels, the little bells on the horses' necks reproducing their trotting in miniature, cries in between, shouts, music, children's voices and cracking whips—everything strange even to the popping of the acorns under my feet in the little garden. If only it could go on, this being known by no-one.'

—RAINER MARIA RILKE, *Selected Letters 1902–26*
(trans. R. F. C. Hull).

'Returning home through Italy, we stopped four days at Naples. In her picturesque setting of the happiest combination of sea and mountain scenery, the inspirer of generations of poets and artists is also the Naples of the lazzaroni, the Eldorado of beggars, and as it struck us, of armies of well-fed priests.'

—MRS R. C. MORGAN, *Glimpses of Four Continents* (1911).

'Lucky the mortal who arrives on the summit of San Costanzo during one of those bewitching moments when the atmosphere is permeated with a glittering haze of floating particles, like powdered gold-dust. The view over the Gulf of Naples, at such times, with its contours framed in a luminous

aureole rather than limned, is not easily forgotten. They are rare, and their glory of brief duration. On other occasions this fairy-like effect is atoned for by the clarity; not only Siren land, but half Campania, lies at our feet. Far away, the sinuous outlines of Tyrrhenian shores with the headland of Circe and the Ponza islets that call up grim memories of Roman banishments; the complex and serrated Apennines whose peaks are visible into the far Abruzzi country; nearer at hand, Elysian Fields, Tartarus and Cimmerian gloom, and the smoking head of Vesuvius decked with a coral necklace of towns and villages. Not an inch of all this landscape but has its associations. Capua and Hannibal; the Caudine Forks; Misenum and Virgil; Nisida, the retreat of a true Siren-worshipper, Lucullus; the venerable acropolis of Cumae; Pompeii; yonder Puteoli, where the apostle of the gentiles touched land; here the Amalfitan coast, Paestum, and the Calabrian hills.

And everywhere the unharvested sea. The sea, with its intense restfulness, is the dominant note of Siren land. There is no escaping from it. Incessant gleams of light flash from that mirror-like expanse; even when unperceived by the senses, among squalid tenements or leafy uplands, they will find you out and follow, like some all-pervading, inevitable melody. How the *Odyssey* throbs with those luminous vibrations! Forest voices are the music of Bach; we seem to wander in cool wooded glades with sunlight pouring through leaves overhead, to breathe the fragrance of dew-spangled moss and fern, to hear the caress of light winds playing among the crowns and the rustling of branches and streamlets and all those elfish woodland notes which the master himself, in his solitary wanderings, had heard and thenceforth imprisoned everlastingly—coaxing their echoes into those numbers whose enchantment none but chosen spirits, little less than angels, can unseal. Some are of multiple voice, like that god-gifted Tschaikovsky, whose melancholy is flecked by exotic passions such as Mozart

or Beethoven never sang—for how shall that come out of a man which was never in him?—lilting, supersensuous measures from old Samarkand where they loved with the love of daemons; muffled pulsations, oft-repeated, doom-enforcing; or an ominous metallic quaver—the wail of the myriad Tartars who fell by the blood-stained waters of Tengis, or, it may be, some premonitory cry of his own tormented soul that fled from earth, all too soon.

‘Others may reflect the camp or court. But Homer voices the sea . . .’

—NORMAN DOUGLAS, *Siren Land* (1911).

‘Try also that [the wine] of Ischia. As a *vino da pasto*, it is surpassed by none south of Rome; indeed, it is drunk all the world over (under other names), and a pretty sight it is to see the many-shaped craft from foreign ports jostling each other in the little circular harbour, one of the few pleasing mementoes of Bourbonism. Try it, therefore, through every degree of latitude on the island, from the golden torrents of thousand-vatted Forio up to the pale primrose-hued ichor, a drink for the gods, that oozes in unwilling drops out of the dwarfed mountain grapes.

‘Large heart in small grape.

‘Try also the red kinds.

‘Try them all, over and over again. Such, at least, was the advice of a Flemish gentleman whom I met, in bygone years, at Casamicciola. Like most of his countrymen, mynheer had little *chiaroscuro* in his composition; he was prone to call a spade a spade; but his “rational view of life,” as he preferred to define it, was transfigured and irradiated by a childlike love of nature. “Where there is no landscape,” he used to say, “there I sit (i.e., drink) without pleasure. Only beasts sit indoors.” Every morning he went in search of new farmhouses in which to sit

during the afternoon and evening. And every night, with tremendous din, he was carried to bed. He never apologized for this disturbance; it was his yearly holiday, he explained. He must have possessed an enviable digestion, for he was up with the lark and I used to hear him at his toilette, singing strange ditties of Meuse or Scheldt. Breakfast over, he would sally forth on his daily quest, thirsty and sentimental as ever. One day, I remember, he discovered a cottage more seductive than all the rest—"with a view over Vesuvius and the coastline—a view, I assure you, of entrancing loveliness!" That evening he never came home at all.'

—NORMAN DOUGLAS, *op. cit.*

'Here, at Citrella, were buried the victims of the cholera of the 1830's, many foreigners among them, and it would be hard to find a pleasanter resting-place for all eternity, unless it be the crater-meadow of Monte Rotaro on Ischia where, simultaneously, the cholera victims of that island were interred. What a contrast between the two! On Rotaro the volcanic earth with its hoary mantle of vegetation and, within the deep funnel, a green woodland calm, as though seas and storms no longer existed upon earth: Citrella, poised like a swallow's nest upon its windswept limestone crag; far below, the Titanic grandeur of South Capri and the dimpled ocean strewn with submarine boulders that make it look, from such aerial heights, like a map of the moon enamelled in the blues and greens of a Damascus vase.'

—NORMAN DOUGLAS, *op. cit.*

'*Procida*, the *Prochyta* of the ancients, is of volcanic origin, like its sister-island Ischia, being composed of pumice-stone and trachitic tufa . . . *Procida* is 2 m. in length and of varying width;

the population (11,500) is occupied in fishing and the cultivation of the vine and other fruit . . . The white, glistening houses with their flat roofs present a somewhat oriental aspect . . .

—BAEDEKER, *Guide to Southern Italy* (1930).

‘A few years ago I witnessed on Ischia a case more pathetic than this one . . . Coming back with Norman [Douglas] from a bathe at San Montana beach, we entered the village of Lacco Ameno—not by the main road but by one of the little alleys that branch off to the left of it, at the back of the church. At this point are some fairly big houses, shattered in the earthquake of 1883 and since then not repaired. There, in a niche in one of them—a niche that had presumably contained the statue of some saint—sat a very old woman, all huddled up. The niche was higher than our heads, and there was just room for her inside it. A terrifying apparition: the nearest approach to a witch that ever I hope to see! She was dressed in black; white hair came tumbling over her tawny and wrinkled face, and her eyes at once fixed themselves upon us. Her right hand was held to her ear as if she listened to something. What was she listening to? She might have been waiting to hear what she heard in 1883—the music of the Singing Stone, which heralded that particular earthquake as it had heralded others, and about which a Danish writer, Bergsoe, has written a short story. The *Pietra Cantante* legend, now perhaps forgotten, was an article of faith among the common people in that year and earlier days. They believed that if a certain pinnacle of rock, visible from Casamicciola, gave forth its sad and long-drawn wail, an earthquake was at hand.

‘There was a fisherman about fifty yards further on . . . I went to him for information. “Was she in the earthquake?” “That old woman? Yes; and they pulled her out alive, but her

THE GULF OF PLEASURE

husband was killed. They had just been married. Then she went mad. You see her, up there? That's where she likes to be. She is so old, we have to humour her. And she always sleeps out of doors; she won't trust any house, not even the new huts of wood. *Povera vecchia*; she won't last much longer. And the worst of it is, when the wind blows hard, she thinks it is something else, and begins screaming furiously and frightening everybody in the place''.

—G. ORIOLI, *Moving Along* (Chatto & Windus) 1934.

ISCHIA IN 1944

On March the 19th Vesuvius erupted
And they pulled in the guns from the neighbouring airfields.
The G.O.R. was at Torre Annunziata
When a cloud of purplish dust settled over everything
(The lava at night was the sight of the century
But could not be mentioned in letters because of security)
Drifting south to Salerno and Sicily,
Sticking in the hair, gritty on the teeth,
Inches thick on the ground—and the Major
Was given a rocket by a R.E.M.E. inspectorate
Because of the filthy state of the transport.

I was given leave in the middle of April—
Brigade had two vacancies for a hotel on Ischia—
For 48 hours. I went with the Signals Officer.
Sunlight on the water and the Porto d'Ischia,
Gay with the Air Sea Rescue launches.

We could easily hear the guns on the mainland,
As the Allies waited to cross the river,
Like dogs barking but afraid of the water
(Too many rivers on the way up Italy).

A HISTORICAL ANTHOLOGY

It was quiet and hot on a hillside of fireflies
Under Epomeo. We had Army rations
Which the hotel cooked disdainfully—
Too poor to afford the supplementary lobsters
The Americans ordered at a dollar a time.
However, we were merry on white wine from Epomeo,
The Signals Officer not being used to drinking.
Later we went down to the town, where the locals
Had barred their doors against drunkenness of the troops.
Some O.R.'s were wearing Service Dress hats of straw
Made by the inhabitants, like ridiculous boaters.

After bathing and climbing the ruins of the fortress
Next day, we decided to return to Naples.
Our food was running out and our lack of money
Lowering our prestige in the eyes of the Italians,
Who gave farewell roses to the American nurses.

From the steamer landing, the vicious life of Naples
Seemed infinitely promising, Ischia more fruitful
Terrain for a mistress or a serious honeymoon.

GAVIN EWART (1944)

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